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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



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June 2009  
*Ecstasy in Daily Life*  
*Eco-awareness and Spirituality*

Vol. 114, No. 6

# THE ROAD TO WISDOM



## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Honour*

### The Most Venerable

**T**HE moral, ethical, and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them. The discoverers of these laws are called Rishis, and we honour them as perfected beings. ... Some of the very greatest of them were women. ... Not even the greatest king could pass by the hermitages, or Ashramas as they were called, without going to pay homage to the sages, for such honour and respect was felt for these holy men.

### The Indian Idea of Honour

Such is human ignorance, that if anyone's ancestors were men whom society honoured, even if they were brutish, if they were robbers, even robber barons, everyone of us would try to trace our ancestry to them. ... In every other country the highest honour belongs to the Kshatriya—the man of the sword. The Pope of Rome will be glad to trace his descent to some robber baron on the banks of the Rhine. In India, the highest honour belongs to the man of peace—the Sharman, the Brahmin, the man of God. The greatest Indian king would be gratified to trace his descent to some ancient sage who lived in the forest, probably a recluse, possessing nothing, dependent upon the villagers for his daily necessities, and all his life trying to solve the problems of this life and the life hereafter.

### The Price of Honour

The general policy of our national law-givers was to give ... this honour. ... But the law does not allow him ever to become rich. The law grinds him down to poverty—only, it gives him this honour. He cannot do a thousand things; and the higher is the caste in the social scale, the more restricted are its enjoyments. The higher the caste, the less the number of kinds of food that man can eat, the less the amount of food that man may eat, the less the number of occupations [he may] engage in. To you, his life would be only a perpetual train of hardships—nothing more than that. It is a perpetual discipline in eating, drinking, and everything; and all [penalties] which are required from the lower caste are required from the higher ten times more.

### How to Become Venerable

By doing well the duty which is nearest to us, the duty which is in our hands now, we make ourselves stronger; and improving our strength in this manner step by step, we may even reach a state in which it shall be our privilege to do the most coveted and honoured duties in life and in society.

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From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,  
1.7, 4.86; 1.374, 4.297; 3.519; 5.240.

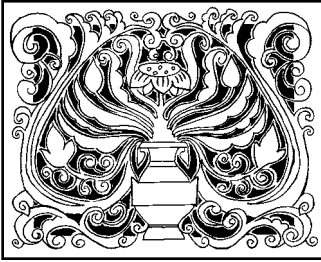


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Amrita Kalasha

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People complain about their griefs and sorrows  
and how they pray to God but find no relief from  
pain. But grief itself is a gift from God.

— *Sri Sarada Devi*



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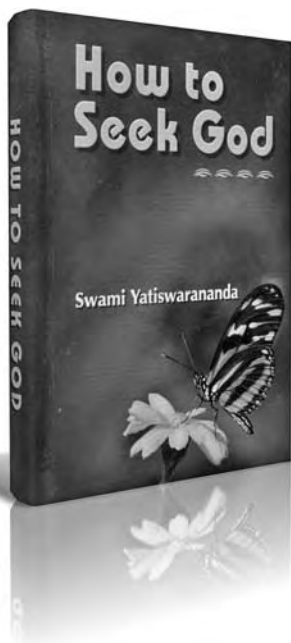
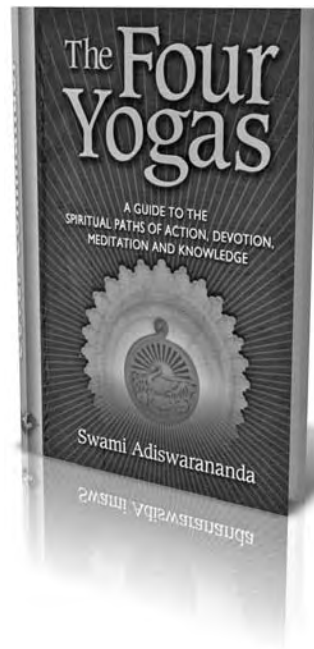
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*We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.*

*Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.*

— Swami Vivekananda



# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## The Immanent

June 2009  
Vol. 114, No. 6

एष ब्रह्मैष इन्द्र एष प्रजापतिरेते सर्वे देवा इमानि च पञ्च महाभूतानि पृथि  
वी वायुराकाश आपो ज्योतीर्षीत्येतानीमानि च क्षुद्रमिश्राणीव बीजानीतराणि  
चेतराणि चाण्डजानि च जारुजानि च स्वेदजानि चोद्भिज्जानि चाश्वा  
गावः पुरुषा हस्तिनो यत्किंचेदं प्राणि जङ्गमं च पतत्रि च यच्च स्थावरं सर्वं  
तत्प्रज्ञानेत्रम् प्रज्ञाने प्रतिष्ठितं प्रज्ञानेत्रो लोकः प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठा प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म ॥

This is Brahman, this is Indra, this is Prajapati; this is all these gods; and this is these five elements—earth, air, space, water, fire; and this is all these (big creatures), together with the tiny ones, that are the procreators of others and are referable in pairs—those born of eggs, of wombs, of moisture, and of the earth—horses, cattle, men, elephants, and all the creatures that there are which move or fly and those which do not move. All these are guided by Consciousness, are supported by Consciousness. The universe has Consciousness as its eye, and Consciousness as its end. Consciousness is Brahman.  
(*Aitareya Upanishad*, 3.1.3)

हंसः शुचिषद्वसुरन्तरिक्षसद्भोता वेदिषदतिथिर्दुरोणसत् ।  
नृषद्वरसदृतसद्वचोमसदब्जा गोजा ऋतजा अद्रिजा ऋतं बृहत् ॥

He is the sun in the bright heavens, the air in the mid-region, the fire in the sacrificial altar, and the guest in the house. He dwells in men, in the gods, in truth, in the sky; He is born in water, from the earth, in the sacrifice, from the mountain; He is the true, the great.  
(*Katha Upanishad*, 2.2.2)

आपो हि ष्ठा मयोभुवस्ता न ऊर्जे दधातन । महे रणाय चक्षसे ।  
यो वः शिवतमो रसस्तस्य भाजयतेह नः ॥ उशतीरिव मातरः ॥

O Waters, you are verily bliss-conferring. Being such, grant us food, and great and beautiful insight (of the supreme Truth). Make us, in this very life, participators in that most auspicious joy of yours, just like fond mothers.  
(*Taittiriya Samhita*, 4.1.5)

स्योना पृथिवि भवा नृक्षरा निवेशनी । यच्छा नः शर्म सप्रथः ॥

Be thornless, O Earth, spread wide before us for a dwelling place; grant us shelter broad and sure.  
(*Rig Veda*, 1.22.15)

# THIS MONTH

Ecology, which addresses the serious threat to existence of life on earth, is the science of the twenty-first century. **Valuing Life** is now important as never before. This number tells us how to do that.

As human creativity constantly explores fresh avenues of happiness, it often overlooks the ultimate source of bliss that is within us. We are reminded of this by Swami Ranganathananda, the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Order, in **Ecstasy in Daily Life**.

In **Sri Ramakrishna and *Rta***, Swami Samarpanananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, explicates the Vedic principle of *rta*, its manifestation in Sri Ramakrishna, and its role in helping us lead harmonious lives.

**Eco-awareness and Spirituality** are much more closely linked than we usually realize. Swami Atmajnananda, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, invites us to acknowledge the gifts of nature, see nature as conscious, and derive important spiritual lessons from it.

Hinduism provides unique insights into current ecological concerns and crises, as also the means to developing ecological sensitivity and understanding. These are highlighted by Rhyddhi Chakraborty of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, in **Hindu Solutions to Deep Ecological Problems**.

**Blending Scientific Spirit and Spirituality for Sustainable Development** is Dr T V Muralivalla-

bhan's article on education in sustainability in Indian universities. The author, who is Reader, Department of Economics, SVRNSS College, Vazhoor, argues that university education ought to be streamlined in terms of information, knowledge, and wisdom to meet the above end.

**Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda** by Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, is a valuable historical document rendered into English from the original Bengali by Swami Vimohananda, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Dr Anil Baran Ray, senior professor, Department of Political Science, Burdwan University, concludes his study of **Sister Nivedita: Art for National Awakening** with an appraisal of Sister Nivedita's influence on and appreciation of Nandalal Basu's works.

Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, discusses the marks of supreme bhakti and the features of preparatory devotion in the eighth instalment of **Narada Bhakti Sutra**.

Swami Chetanananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, concludes his article on **Girish and Sri Sarada Devi** with a review of some of Girish's plays that the Holy Mother witnessed.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna, former Head, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad, reviews the **Concise Encyclopaedia of Hinduism**, a work of remarkable labour and devotion.



## EDITORIAL

# Valuing Life

THE National Informatics Centre, New Delhi, has this to say about the Champawat district, the home of *Prabuddha Bharata*:

In this district 65 per cent of the area is under forest and net sown area is less than 10 per cent. Only about 9 per cent of the sown area is irrigated and agriculture is mainly rain fed. Consequently, it is at subsistence level and only traditional crops are grown. ... Around 82 per cent of workers are engaged in agriculture and there are negligible workers in household or non-household industry. On a very limited sown area a large number of people are dependent. ... A large number of males are serving in the armed forces of the country. The family economy is more or less dependent on the money order system. The females of the region have to look after their family. ... There are no small or medium scale industries in the region. As a result majority of population of the youth are unemployed. ... The district is economically and socially backward with acute poverty and society ridden with outmoded traditions and even superstitions. ... The women suffer from all kinds of social disabilities, at the same time handling each and every responsibility of domestic work as well as collection of fuel and fodder and in large cases drinking water from distant places.

Compare this with what the eco-historian Ramachandra Guha has to say:

The Central Himalayas is composed of two distinct ecological zones: the monsoon-affected areas at middle and low altitudes, and the high valleys of the north. ... Along the river valleys cultivation was carried out, limited only by the steepness of land and more frequently by the difficulty of irrigation. Two and sometimes three harvests were possible throughout the last [nineteenth] century, wheat, rice, and millet being the chief cereals grown. The system of tillage and methods of crop rotation

bore the marks of the hillmen's natural environment. With production oriented towards subsistence needs, which were comfortably met, there remained a surplus of grain for export to Tibet and southwards to the plains. ... The absence of sharp inequalities in land ownership among the cultivating proprietors who formed the bulk of the population was the basis of solidarity within the village community. ... Village sites were usually chosen half-way up the spur, below oak forests and the perennial springs associated with them, and above the cultivated fields along the river bed. In such a situation all crops could be 'raised to perfection', a healthy elevated site was available for houses, and herds of cattle could be comfortably maintained. Until 1910 most villages came close to this ideal.

Henry Ramsay, who served as commissioner of Kumaun with distinction from 1856 to 1884, had described the hill cultivators—'having six months stock of grain at hand, and with their diets supplemented by fish, fruit, vegetables, and animal flesh'—as 'probably better off than any peasantry in India'. The Champawat district was, however, recently included in the pilot project of the *Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana*, the 'national equitable development programme', initiated by the Union Planning Commission. This programme targets 'pockets of high poverty and low growth', the result of 'existing barriers to growth and lack of infrastructure'.

Have the Kumaun hills, of which Champawat is a part, taken a significant downturn over the last hundred years? Or, has this region simply been deprived of the developments that have been taking place in other parts of India? Or, do our opening paragraphs merely reflect differences in the vision of development?

It would be difficult to substantiate the first conjecture. Since its designation as an independent

district in 1997—it had earlier been part of Almora and then Pithoragarh district—the Champawat district has seen a marked spurt in urban growth centred around the towns of Champawat and Lohaghat. This growth is reflected in increasing urban construction and business activity. There has also been a significant improvement in rural housing. Despite the health care facilities in the district being largely skeletal, the district's crude death rate of 3.8 per thousand and the infant mortality rate of 30 per thousand live births are well below the national average of 9 and 72 respectively. The maternal mortality rate of 3 per thousand live births is also on a par with the national average, even though the district hospital lacks the services of an obstetrician. With an overall literacy rate of 71.6 per cent against the national average of 65.4 and a near universal primary school enrolment one would wonder if the district was as underdeveloped as it is made out to be.

That things are not as well as the above statistics indicate is suggested by nearly 40 per cent of the population being listed as subsisting below the poverty line. But economic indicators alone can be very misleading. A less noticed, but nevertheless important, piece of statistics is the 61 totally uninhabited villages reported in the 2001 census. This is nearly 10 per cent of all villages in the district. And the other villages too have many empty households.

Permanent migration to urban areas or out of the district belies the value of the rich local eco-diversity for residents of the district. The Kumaun region has been 'the epicentre of the Chipko Andolan, possibly the best known contemporary movement against the exploitation of forests by an outside agency'. Chipko, incidentally, is 'only one—though undoubtedly the most organized—in a series of protests against commercial forestry dating from the earliest days of state intervention'.

These protests have been as much against exogenous commercial exploitation of the local forests as against the deprivation of the local populace from subsistence rights within the forests. The process started with the state demarcation of forest areas in

Almora in 1875, was accelerated by the declaration of all unmeasured land in the Kumaun district as 'district protected forest' (DPF) in 1893, and culminated in the carving out of extensive reserve forests from the DPFs in 1911. This alienated the hill people from the very forests they considered their own and deprived them of their major source of fuel and fodder as well as the minor forest produce and some of the water sources on which their livelihood was largely dependent. And this happened even as outside agencies exploited the forests for timber, resin, and other products, both legally and otherwise.

The Chipko activism has checked the rampant destruction of the Kumaun ecosphere to a great extent. But this has not translated into equivalent socioeconomic advancement of the hill people. The populace certainly deserves carbon credits for the forests it holds. But more important is the formulation and implementation of development plans that are sensitive as much to the environment as to human needs and aspirations.

Accessibility may be taken as a case in point. The Tanakpur–Tawaghat road, which is one of the two arterial links connecting Champawat to the plains, has large stretches in poor state of development and repair despite being declared a national highway for its strategic importance. Landslides often leave it unmotorable in the rainy season. This is a crucial bottleneck in the provision of basic infrastructure and services facilities, besides discouraging skilled professionals from continuing to reside in this area.

Local activism to get the concerned public works departments to ensure safe all-weather motorable road conditions has had little effect. Even the tragic landslide that crushed to death seventeen occupants of a state transport bus in July 2008 has failed to mend matters. This underscores the tragedy of much of the development effort across the globe: the undervaluation of human life and worth. If only we could learn to value human life a little more, we would inevitably be less dismissive of our ecological needs and more caring towards our flora and fauna. Nature, in turn, would recompense us adequately.



# Ecstasy in Daily Life

Swami Ranganathananda

THE famous British poet Coleridge says: 'Knowledge begins and ends in wonder; but the first wonder is the child of ignorance, the second wonder is the parent of adoration.' A child is full of wonder because it is ignorant. A great scholar, a great scientist, also is full of wonder. That wonder makes him adore the profound mystery that you see in man and nature. And that is also the way the great Einstein describes the religious feeling: a sense of tremendous wonder at the mystery of the universe and a sense of adoration of that infinite mystery.

Adoration of the Divine in man and nature is the product of profound knowledge. That is what you find in the Upanishads, in the Bhagavadgita, in all these great books. Men and women take to adoration, the worship of God in the fullness of knowledge and understanding; not like primitive human beings who were full of ignorance, superstition, and fear. This change in understanding of the phenomenon of religion is absolutely essential today because, we are taught in anthropology, 'religion is a primitive phenomenon, the product of ignorance, fear, superstition.' That is entirely wrong. Religion begins in that superstition and fear, but through the ages it evolves when great minds handle that great phenomenon. That is what happened in the Upanishads. Brilliant minds in search of truth had dealt with this phenomenon known as 'man adoring God'. Out of that came a profound philosophy and spirituality which is above the intellect, above the rational level, not below; it is supra-rational, supra-mental, supra-intellectual. That is how pure

religion comes into the picture. And that pure religion you can find in all the world religions, en-crusted with so many other material things.

## Divine Joy

Man takes to religion to experience a sense of fulfilment. Man adores God also to achieve that sense of fulfilment. Daily life is full of strain, full of struggles and tensions. We want to get a little fresh experience of joy. We seek religion for that. Even festivals we have, once or twice in a year, just to enjoy ourselves. Daily tensions, daily struggles—these things we have aplenty. So, the calendar of the year is marked with a few bright spots. We celebrate those occasions to capture a bit of joy more than usual. That is the meaning of 'festival'.

In India we have the annual Dipavali, the festival of lights. It falls in October–November. It is a wonderful festival. All homes are lighted; every institution is lighted—with candles or oil lamps. People have a good bath, put on fresh dresses, and have wonderful feasts. All the children enjoy; and there are plenty of fireworks. That is called a festival of joy. In a normal human life one day in a year is bright, all the rest are humdrum: no joy, somehow eking out a living. If you ask, 'How are you doing?', 'Going on somehow' is the only answer people give.

Imagine a human being whose whole life is a perpetual festival—full of joy, always. No separate day is necessary for such a person. They are called incarnations of God, beings like Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Sri Ramakrishna. They are in perpetual joy and they share that joy with you, with all others. This is the real teaching of religion. There is a beautiful Sanskrit verse which expresses this idea and which can be applied fully, hundred per cent, to

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This is the transcript of a parlour talk given by the author during one of his international tours. The text has been minimally edited.



a character like Sri Ramakrishna, who lived in our time. We have not to imagine him in a legendary way. His was perpetual joy, and people came to share in it. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by M, you find this mentioned: 'Ramakrishna's room was a mart of joy.' This is the language: 'A mart of joy'. The Master was a centre of infinite joy, full of cheerfulness. That is expressed in this Sanskrit verse, a very famous verse from the *Pandava Gita*:

*Nityotsavo bhavet-teṣām  
nitya-śrīr-nitya-maṅgalam;  
Yeṣām hṛdistho bhagavān  
maṅgalāyatanam hariḥ.*

Every day is a festival, every day is auspicious, every day brings welfare to those in whose hearts is established Hari, the divine Reality.<sup>1</sup>

This is a wonderful verse. *Nityotsava*: daily festival, that is *nityotsava*. *Bhavet-teṣām*: to such people, every day is a festival. *Nitya-śrī*: every day is good fortune. *Nitya-maṅgala*: every day is supreme welfare. *Śrī, maṅgala, kalyāṇa*: all these mean the same thing. Everything is full of joy, full of cheer, full of festivity, full of welfare for such people. Who are they? *Yeṣām hṛdistho bhagavān hariḥ*: in whose heart is established that Bhagavan, the blessed divine Reality, whom in Sanskrit we call Hari, the one Self in all beings, the infinite in the finite. What kind of Bhagavan? *Mangalāyatanam hariḥ*: Hari, who is the ocean of all that is good and auspicious. God is the centre of all that is good, all that is auspicious, all that is joyous. That God has entered into my heart. What shall I lack thereafter? That is why in all our bhakti traditions we have this great teaching: 'Man! Install God in your heart. Then you will see a richness coming to you which you will miss otherwise.'

When we install God in a temple, it is something we do outside. But that 'doing' is meant to help us install him in our own hearts. The best place to install God is one's own heart. That is what makes you really full of joy. Something infinite comes into you: infinite joy.

Occasionally, a few individuals appear on the horizon of human life and they show the truth.

Lesser individuals follow the great saints. They also show the truth. Apart from gigantic personalities like Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Sri Ramakrishna, we have other saints who are also full of joy. India has many saints full of joy. The Christian Church has produced one of the greatest saints of joy, St Francis of Assisi; and also St Teresa of Avila. These are all great saints of joy. I liked a book published in English some years ago: *Saints Are Not Sad*. It was necessary to write such book in the West, because religion in the West became a sad affair. If you are joyous and you take to religion, then your face becomes long immediately: long-faced religion. So many teachings were given to people to make them understand that religion is sadness. In order to protest against this somebody wrote that book, *Saints Are Not Sad*. And so many beautiful Catholic saints are depicted there, full of joy. Jesus himself is shown as a man of sorrow. But in life he was a man of joy—eating, drinking, making fun with people. You will find plenty of that in the New Testament.

St Teresa protested against this heaviness of religion presented by several theologians in her autobiography, where she writes: 'A sad nun is a bad nun.' She also writes: 'O God! Save us from solemn saints.' This concept of religion as a source of joy is central to Vedanta. Why? In our great Upanishads, God is defined as bliss, as joy. A famous passage of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* says:

*Raso vai saḥ. Rasam hyevāyam  
labdhvā nandī bhavati.  
Ko hyevānyāt-kaḥ prānyāt.  
Yadeṣa ākāśa anando na syāt.*

He indeed is Bliss. Having obtained that Bliss one becomes joyous. Who indeed could have inhaled, who could have exhaled, if this Bliss be not there in the space (of the heart).<sup>2</sup>

A wonderful passage. The entire bhakti tradition of India takes its inspiration from this passage: 'God indeed is Bliss, *raso vai saḥ*.' The word *vai* in Sanskrit means 'indeed'. It is a truth affirmed: *rasa* is the word for bliss, joy, taste, aesthetic delight—all these are meant by the word *rasa*. So what is God?

God is *rasa*, an ocean of bliss. The second line says: *Rasam hyevāyaṁ labdhvā nandī bhavati*—this man or woman here becomes full of joy when he or she gets a bit of that *rasa* from God. *Ānandī bhavati*, becomes full of ananda, full of bliss. The next line says: *Ko hyevānyāt-kaḥ prānyāt. Yadeṣa ākāśa anando na syāt*—who could have lived, who could have breathed in this world, if that infinite ocean of bliss was not nearby, and from which you could take a little now and then. And then it says: *Eṣa hyevānandayāti*—Every type of bliss you experience in life is nothing but a bit of that bliss of God, coming to you through this channel and that channel.

We eat a beautiful meal, we feel joy. Wherefrom does it come? From that same infinite source, through that particular medium. Every joy in life, either in a proper form or in an inverted form, comes from that infinite ocean of joy which is God. This is the teaching of Vedanta, of the Upanishads. Based upon this, India developed a religion for all humanity, a religion of joy. That is the bhakti religion of India. Bhakti does not make any distinction of caste, creed, race, or colour. It is an invitation for man to invite God into his or her heart. That God is already there; only we don't realize him, we don't recognize him. 'Installing God in one's heart' means recognizing the infinite present in the finite. The infinite, is the infinite of joy, infinite of pure consciousness, infinite of pure being. *Sat-cit-ananda* means that: infinite existence, infinite consciousness, infinite bliss.

That is how God is defined in the Upanishads. That is how man is defined in the Upanishads. We are unaware of this truth. We think we are this tiny organic system, constantly under the pressures of the world outside. Even though nature has given us the organic capacity to realize this truth, we neglect it all the time under the pressure of our external life. That is why at some stage a certain desire for adoration comes in. A wonderful mystery of the Divine; somehow it affects us. In the language of the English poet Wordsworth, we get when we pass through life 'intimations of immortality'. Just looking at nature, seeing some particular event in life, meeting with somebody, or reading a book—some intima-

tions of immortality come to us, but very often they go away because we do not cultivate them. This is just like a cloud covering the sun. The cloud parts, the sun shines; otherwise, all through it is cloudy.

Those who are alert snatch that moment: an intimation of immortality. They make it a more constant experience. This is the meaning of bhakti. Bhakti comes to anyone at every level. I may be a very worldly man; even then I can have bhakti, the beginnings of bhakti. Some wonder, some intimation; yet the old mind is still worldly. Does not matter. Bhakti has entered, now cultivate it little by little. Adoration, worship, singing, and reading of holy books are the scientific apparatuses to cultivate this beautiful new awareness that has come to us. This is known as the science of bhakti. There are so many great books dealing with the subject. 'God is bliss' is one utterance; 'God is love' is another utterance. That you find also in the Bible: 'God is love'.

### **Bhakti and Fearlessness**

How to cultivate love? How to cultivate bliss coming out of that love? The whole thing becomes a

**We divide ourselves into two to love God**, myself loving my Self. God has created me and I have created God. We create God in our image; it is we who create Him to be our master, it is not God who makes us His servants. When we know that we are one with God, that we and He are friends, then come equality and freedom. So long as you hold yourself separated by a hair's breadth from this Eternal One, fear cannot go.

Never ask that foolish question, what good will it do to the world? Let the world go. Love and ask nothing; love and look for nothing further. Love and forget all the 'isms'. Drink the cup of love and become mad. Say 'Thine, O Thine for ever, O Lord!' and plunge in, forgetting all else. The very idea of God is love. Seeing a cat loving her kittens stand and pray. God has become manifest there; literally believe this. Repeat 'I am Thine, I am Thine', for we can see God everywhere. Do not seek for Him, just see Him.

—Swami Vivekananda

complete philosophy of life and fulfilment. That is how bhakti was presented by the great teachers. This teaching produced numberless characters full of joy. Along with this bhakti, along with the love and bliss that come out of bhakti, one more quality comes into human life: fearlessness. Bhakti destroys fear. Love destroys fear. Fear of God goes away. Fear of the world goes away. Fear has no place in the pure religion of bhakti.

Addressing an audience in San Francisco, Swami Vivekananda made this reference: 'Love knows no fear.' Then he found on the faces of the ladies a certain doubt, a certain questioning: 'We are all mothers, with love in our hearts; still we have so many fears. How does the swami say "Love destroys fear"?' Swamiji sensed it, and immediately explained this teaching through an illustration: 'Suppose one of you mothers, a weak woman, sees a tiger in the street snatching your child. I know where you will be: you will face the tiger. Another time a dog appears in the street, and you will fly. But you jump at the mouth of the tiger and snatch your child away. Love knows no fear. It conquers all evil. The fear of God is the beginning of religion, but the love of God is the end of religion. All fear has died out.'<sup>3</sup>

If this little love can show so much of fearlessness, when that infinite love of God comes, what doubt can be there? Man becomes utterly fearless. *Abhaya* is the word in Sanskrit: fearlessness. *Bhaya* means fear. *Abhaya* means fearlessness. And the only literature where God is described and defined as 'the fearless' is the Indian bhakti literature. *Akuto-bhaya*, 'Where is [the place for] fear?', that is a name of God. Nearer you go, there is no fear; away you go, and there is fear. It is just like being away from the sun, you feel cool; nearer the sun, you get warm. So, God is *akuto-bhaya*. Those who go towards God are described as *gacchatām akuto-bhayaṃ*, moving towards that state which is called fearlessness. Fearlessness, along with strength, love, and then joy or bliss—this is what is promised to every human being through the science of bhakti, the science of devotion to God. There is a huge lit-

erature on it, of which the greatest, the most influential throughout India is the Bhagavata, described in the book itself as *rasam-ālayam*, the ocean of *rasa*, ocean of divine love. 'Come and drink as much as you want,' says the third verse of the Bhagavata: *Pibata bhāgavatam*, drink this Bhagavata, *rasam-ālayam*, the ocean of *rasa*. *Muhuraho rasikā bhuvi bhāvukāḥ*: drink the Bhagavata again and again, you who can appreciate love and have experienced some love. *Muhuraho*, again and again you drink; you won't be satisfied, unlike with other types of food. But you must have the capacity to appreciate *rasa*, appreciate love, appreciate joy. If a poet is told to recite these poems, the audience must be slightly poetic. Then they can appreciate it. To recite a beautiful poem before a prosaic audience is to find no joy, neither in the reciter nor in the audience. So, to appreciate God we must have some capacity to love in the heart. Some experience of love—any love can become the basis for being developed into divine love. Sri Ramakrishna used to ask people who came to him: Do you love anybody? Your wife, your husband, your children, your neighbour—anybody you love? Yes; then you can build up great bhakti. Any love you can build up into a great bhakti. One of them said, 'I have no love for anybody.' 'You are a dry fellow. You have missed the whole beauty of life.' Have something to love; then you can develop the infinite dimension of that love. It is already there in your heart; you have only to realize it. So, in this context, we who live our daily lives with our struggles, our problems, how can we bring that bhakti into our hearts? In the ninth chapter of the Gita, Sri Krishna describes his teaching of bhakti in a famous verse:

*Rāja-vidyā rāja-guhyam  
pavitram-idam-uttamam;  
Pratyakṣāvagamam dharmyam  
susukham kartum-avyayam.*

Of sciences, the highest; of profundities, the deepest; of purifiers, the supreme, is this; it is realizable by direct perception, is endowed with ethical and moral values, is very easy to perform, and is of an imperishable nature.<sup>4</sup>

This science of bhakti is a kingly science: *rāja-vidyā*. *Rājā* means king; this is royal science. See the language. I may study physics, it is a great science. It cannot make me fulfilled. It cannot make me deal with you in an efficient manner. Its relevance is very limited. Similar is the case with any other physical science you take. They are all good. They give me nice houses, nice food; everything material they can give. But inter-human relationships and my relationship with myself cannot be enriched by any physical science. But this science of love, which is bhakti, will do it immensely. This is called *rāja-vidyā*. Among sciences, this is the kingly science. *Rāja-guhyā*, among profundities, this is a kingly profundity. Profound is this science. *Pavitrām-idam-uttamam*, it is supremely purifying. It purifies the entire human life, human relationships. The house in which you live becomes purified when this bhakti finds expression there. 'Purifying' is the word. When the body is dirty, we purify it with soap. When the mind is dirty, we purify it with knowledge. When the whole being is dirty, you can purify it only with pure love of God. That is the inner purification.

Such a profound subject! It must be very difficult, meant only for scholars or giants. No, it is meant for everyone, even for children. Why? *Pratyakṣāvagamam*, it can be realized in day-to-day life. Everyday I am working in the kitchen; I can realize it there. I am working in the factory; I can realize it there. Directly experienced in day-to-day life is this great subject. Not like in a material science, where we have to make a ten-billion expenditure to raise a laboratory and all other costly things; nothing of that sort. This science does not need any costly apparatus. A little changing of the mind, that is all. Therefore, it is *pratyakṣāvagamam*, easy to be realized. *Pratyakṣa* means direct experience; day-to-day experience. In work, in leisure, in holidays, every time it is possible because it is not a thing foreign to you. It is your own inner nature. That infinite is your own, your own Self. It fills you; we have only not taken note of it. We are not aware of it. Living by the great lake of pure water we are

## Spiritualizing Everyday Life

First of all, a strong philosophical conviction. Second, an effort to change one's outlook in practice. Every time anybody passes by remind yourself, 'Here is God Himself passing in the form of this person.' Afterwards, you will not even say 'in the form of this person,' but just 'God Himself passing by.' Hearing a voice you will say, 'God Himself is speaking.' Looking at the face, looking into the eyes, you will say, 'God Himself is looking through these eyes at me.' 'It is God who is shaking my hand.' You will have to persuade yourself of these things. Next, you should destroy all the opposite tendencies, opposite convictions and instincts. ...

A time comes, after the period of struggle is over, when a new quality reveals itself in the smile of the mother, and the children dote on her. She talks to them in a new way and there is something in it that goes deep into their hearts. The husband feels it, too, and so do the relatives and friends. True, it is not fun in the old way, but to all it is a source of attraction, and all find it good to be with her.

—Swami Ashokananda

hungry and thirsty all the time, not knowing that a stretch of hand can bring it here. That is how bhakti is presented: *pratyakṣāvagamam*.

Then, another description: *dharmyam*. It will increase the strength of the society in which you live. It makes for better inter-human relationship, better integration of man with man, better harmony in society.

(To be concluded)

## References

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# Sri Ramakrishna and Rta

Swami Samarpanananda

SWAMI Vivekananda's composition 'Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna,' sung during evening prayers by thousands of devotees around the world, is special in many ways. It is a prayer that addresses the impersonal aspect of Sri Ramakrishna and, from the literary point of view, it is an acrostic poem in which the first syllables of every line, put together, form the powerful mantra *om namo bhagavate rāmakṛṣṇāya*. In this article we shall discuss the first three words of the hymn: *om*, *hrīm*, and *rtam*, with particular stress on the third one. These three words taken together give us an idea who and what Sri Ramakrishna is.

Om is the mystic sound that represents God. The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavadgita, Puranas, Tantras, and other scriptures of Hinduism unanimously accept Om as the symbol of the Supreme Godhead, the non-dual Brahman. For someone who has realized Brahman the best way to describe it is through *mauna*, silence; the next best way is through Om. This is the reason why almost every mantra of the Hindus pointing at God begins with Om. This mystic sound-symbol has also found acceptance in later religious movements of India, like Sikhism.

There is a whole range of discussion on Om in many Upanishads, particularly in the *Mandukya Upanishad*, where this mystic sound is described as the key to creation and to spiritual realization. The importance of Om has been discussed in the Gita and other scriptures as well, and in recent times many books have been written on the subject.

*Hrīm* is a *bīja*, a seed-mantra, used in Tantric rituals and practices to signify the divine power responsible for Creation. According to Tantra, the absolute Brahman, described as *sat-cit-ekam*—the non-dual Consciousness that alone exists—requires its own inseparable Shakti, creative Power, to effectuate the Creation. Sri Ramakrishna uses the examples of the

calm and wavy waters to explain the unity of absolute Brahman and Brahman associated with its creative Power. Shakti remains in potential form within Brahman, and at the time of Creation this Shakti becomes active. This activated Power, inseparable from Brahman, is signified by the *bīja* mantra *hrīm*.

By using two of the most potent mystic equivalents of the Godhead, Om and *hrīm*, Swami Vivekananda posits Sri Ramakrishna as the supreme Brahman, beyond any kind of modification, and also as Shakti, the creative Power responsible for the creation of the universe. Brahman and Shakti are like fire and its burning power, or like milk and its whiteness.

The third term *ṛta* is equally profound. In the same hymn, Swamiji mentions *ṛta* again in the phrase *rāge kṛte ṛtapathe*, adding importance to the term.

## General Meaning of Rta

In the Vedas the word *ṛta* has been used quite frequently, but in later scriptures its use dwindled. In its place words like *satya*, truth, and *dharma*, righteousness, have been used more frequently, often carrying the same connotation as *ṛta*. *Ṛta* has, of course, been also used in the Vedas to convey many different ideas.

The word *ṛta* is derived from the root *ṛ*—its meaning in the Rig Veda being 'to go the right way, be pious or virtuous'; so *ṛta* means 'fixed or settled order, law, rule'. In the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata, and some other sacred texts *ṛta* means 'true', and at times 'truth personified'. In the *Panchatantra* and again in the Mahabharata, *ṛta* is used to mean truth in general, and also righteousness. In the *Manu Samhita* the term is used to mean the right means of livelihood for a brahmana, as opposed to, for example, agriculture which is *anṛta* for him.

Sayanacharya explains the term *ṛtasya* as *avaśyamābhāvinaḥ karmaphalasya*<sup>1</sup>, which means that *ṛta* is something that would always produce results. This production of results by *ṛta* is not like the inevitable cause-and-effect relationship of the material world, according to which every cause would definitely produce an effect, but it is more like the successful harvest of a crop in which the farmer obtains the full yield instead of any other result.

The *Nighantu*—a Vedic lexicon—defines *satya* as having six synonyms, one of which is *ṛta*. According to this, *ṛta* is truth and *anṛta* is the opposite, as in the mantra ‘*satyamidvā u taṁ vayamindram satvāma nānṛtam*; let us extol Indra who is in truth, and not in untruth’ (8.62.12). In the Vedas *ṛta* has also been used to mean *yajña*, sacrifice, *satya*, truth, and *dharma*, moral code.

Many scholars believe that these terms originally referred to one and the same concept—a belief that continues till today. This has made many general readers translate *ṛta* as truth, which is not always correct, as can be seen in the following Vedic mantra:

*Satyam br̥had ṛtam ugram dikṣā tapo  
brahma yajñah prthivīm dhārayanti.*

These are the virtues that nourish and sustain this world: *satyam br̥hat*, the great truth; *ṛtam ugram*, formidable order; *dikṣā*, consecration, initiation; *tapas*, austerity; *brahma*, prayer, spiritual exaltation; and *yajña*, sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

The distinct use of *satya* and *ṛta* in the above mantra shows that Vedic sages gave different connotations to these two terms. Therefore, *satya* and *ṛta* do not imply the same thing in all contexts. The same principle applies to the triad of *yajña*, *dharma*, and *ṛta*—they do not refer to the same concept, as can be verified from the following examples.

*Śraddhayā satyamāpyate*; one attains the truth through faith.<sup>3</sup> This attainment of truth through *śraddhā* is a unique concept never ascribed to *ṛta*. *Ṛtam ca satyam cābhiddhāt tapaso’dhajāyata*; from the blazing *tapas* was born *ṛtam*, eternal order, and truth.<sup>4</sup>

In a shanti mantra of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*

we come across ‘*ṛtam vadiṣyāmi, satyam vadiṣyāmi*; I shall call you righteousness, I shall call you truth’. Here also *satya* and *ṛta* are not one and the same. While commenting on this, Acharya Shankara differentiates the two by explaining that *ṛta* ‘is an idea fully ascertained by the intellect in accordance with the scriptures and in conformity with practice’, and *satya* ‘is that which is reduced to practice through speech and bodily action’.<sup>5</sup> According to this explanation, *ṛta* is an ideal state, whereas *satya* is the state of actuality.

The concept of *ṛta* as the eternal law, that deserved utmost respect, was so ingrained in the Vedic sages that they thought of two gods as its custodians. The sages believed that wherever *ṛta* is successfully observed, it is due to the sternness of the twin gods Mitra and Varuna: ‘*mitrah satyo varuṇo dharmapatinām*; Mitra for true-speaking (*satya*), Varuna for the sway of law’s (dharma’s) protectors’.<sup>6</sup> In this mantra, truth and dharma have been entrusted separately to Mitra and Varuna, who otherwise are together responsible for *ṛta*. This indicates that in the Vedas *ṛta* is conceived from truth and dharma conjointly.

The importance of *yajna*, sacrifice, and its close connection with *ṛta* and *satya* is hinted in this shloka:

*Satyam ca me śraddhā ca me jagacca me dhanam ca  
me viśvam ca me mahāśca me krīḍā ca me modāśca  
me jātam ca me janīṣyamānam ca me sūktam ca me  
sukṛtam ca me yajñena kalpantām.*

May my truth and my faith, and my activities and my wealth, and my world and my glory, and my play and my enjoyment, and my children and my future children, and my hymns and my pious acts prosper through sacrifice (18.5).

The power of truth and *ṛta* increases in the world through the practice of sacrifices. In the ‘Purusha Sukta’ the very act of Creation has been described as a *yajna* performed by the gods and in which Purusha, God, himself is sacrificed. This shloka also suggests that though these three terms—*ṛta*, *satya*, and *yajña*—are closely connected, by all means they are not the same.

*Ṛta* has also been used quite often to denote what today is understood by *dharma*. In fact, later scriptures replaced *rta* with *dharma*. Let us see some examples.

*Pari cinmarto draviṇaṁ mamanyād-ṛtasya pathā namasā vivāset*; let a man think well on wealth and strive to win it by the path of law and worship.<sup>7</sup>

*Ṛtasya panthām na taranti duṣkṛtaḥ*; the evil doers do not travel on the path of the eternal law (9.73.6).

*Ṛtavākena satyena śraddhayā tapasā suta indrāyendo pari srava*; pressed with words of law and truth, with faith and devotion, O Indu, flow towards Indra (9.113.2).

*Ṛtaṁ śaṁsanta ṛju dīdhyānā*; praising the eternal law, thinking straight (the sons of Angirasa held the rank of sages) (10.67.2).

As we shall see later, there is a close link between *rta* and *dharma*, though they are not precisely the same.

### **Ṛta: The Eternal Law that Regulates Everything**

Coming closer to understanding *rta*, we find that the Vedas use the term to mean the divine law that makes everything in the universe behave the way it should: '*Ṛtasya raśmim-anuṣacchamānā bhadraṁ bhadraṁ kratum-asmāsu dhehi*'; obedient to the rein of the law eternal, give us every blissful thought' (1.123.13). The eternal law, in producing the cosmic order, also produces beauty, symmetry, and symphony. Living beings and the world of matter participate in a beautiful orderly life through the power of the eternal and sacred law, *rta*, working in and through them:

*Ṛtasya hi śurudhaḥ santi pūrvīr-  
ṛtasya dhītīrvrjinānī hanti*;

*Ṛtasya śloko badhirā tatardā  
karnā budhānaḥ śucamāna āyoh*.

The eternal law has varied food that strengthens; thought of the eternal law removes transgressions. The praise-hymn of the eternal law, arousing, glowing, has opened the deaf ears of the living.

*Ṛtasya dṛḥhā dharuṇāni santi  
purūṇi candrā vapuṣe vapūṁsi*;  
*Ṛtena dīrgham-iṣaṇanta prkṣa  
ṛtena gāva ṛtamā viveśuḥ*.

Firm-seated are the eternal law's foundations; in its fair form are many splendid beauties. By the holy law long lasting food they bring us; by the holy law have cows come to our worship.

*Ṛtaṁ yemāna ṛtamid vanoty-  
ṛtasya śuṣmasturayā u gavyuḥ*;  
*Ṛtāya pṛthvī bahule gabhire  
ṛtāya dhenū parama duhāte*.

Fixing the eternal law he, too, upholds it; swift moves the might of law and wins the booty. To the law belong the vast deep earth and heaven: milchkin supreme, to the law their milk they render (4.23.8–10).

*Madhu vātā ṛtāyate madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ*;  
*mādhvīrnaḥ santvoṣadhiḥ*.

The winds waft nectar, the rivers pour nectar for the person who keeps the law: so may the plants be honeyed for us (1.90.6).

As mentioned earlier, Mitra and Varuna are held jointly responsible for the upkeep of *rta*, for which they are praised by the sages. It is further stressed that both individuals and society gather strength by adjusting to *rta*, the divine law:

*Tā vām viśvasya gopā devā deveṣu yajñīyā, ṛtāvānā  
yajase pūṭadkṣasā*; I worship you—gods, holiest among the gods—who guard this all; you, faithful to the law, whose power is sanctified (8.25.1).

*Ṛtāvānā ni śedatuḥ sāmṛājyāya sukratū, dhṛtavrata  
kṣatriyā kṣatram-āśatuḥ*; they, true to the law, exceeding strong, have set themselves down for sovereignty; valiant heroes, whose laws stand fast, they have obtained their sway (8.25.8).

Here it is stressed that strength comes to one who is true to the law. And the same applies to social laws, which the king is the guardian of. What Mitra and Varuna are to the divine law, the king or the government is to society. If it is important to observe the commands of religion, it is equally



important to follow the social code of conduct as set by the community. To gain worldly prosperity and also spiritual well-being one has to hold on to the law, both divine and social, which are but aspects of *rta*.

*Rta* has also been perceived as the supreme Reality in the form of *rta-sat*—dweller in *rta*.<sup>8</sup> God and his laws are inseparable, and by observing the injunctions of the scriptures one follows God's commands.

This identity of the law and the law-giver can be further seen in the following mantra:

*Ayamasmi jaritaḥ paśya meha viśvā  
jātānyabhyasmi mahnā;  
Ṛtasya mā pradiśo vardhayantyādardiro  
bhuvanā dardarimi.*

Indra says: 'I exist, O singer! Look upon me here; all that exists I surpass in splendour. The eternal law's commandments make me mighty. When I rend, I rend asunder the worlds' (8.89.4).

This mantra depicts the sage filled with the realization of the Divine—here Indra stands for the Divine—in the form of splendour and *rta*; while later spiritual aspirants had the vision of the Divine in anthropomorphic forms. This concept of the Divine in the form of law is common to Judaism and Buddhism as well.

Another interesting shloka hints that God himself reveals the mantras in the hearts of the sages, and that *rta*—here it might mean 'rites'—can be born anew. It seems that there is no end to the discovery of new laws pervading the universe: '*vyūrṇoti hṛdā matim navyo jāyatām-rtam*'; he reveals the hymn in the heart, let *rta* be born anew' (1.105.15).

It is the Divine that reveals the law to the sages, and when these revelations are recorded and handed over from generation to generation they become known as scriptures. Therefore, the rishis have emphasized the need to live up to the words and spirit of the scriptures for individual and social upliftment, both material and spiritual. This is emphasized in every religion. And since everything in the universe is regulated by this principle of *rta*, it is the duty of

every religion to keep an eye on the proper flow of the world order. Whenever something is done against this universal rhythm it is considered *anṛta*, opposite to the natural law. This violation of *rta* destabilizes the inner order of things.

### **Rta, Vedanta, and Sri Ramakrishna**

According to Vedanta, *tattva* is 'that which is'; *satya* has the same meaning too; whereas *dharma* means 'that which holds'. Conversely, the nature of *rta* is connected with 'is-ness' and with 'holding together' as well. This means that in essence *rta* is one with *satya* and *dharma* taken together. In a wider sense *tattva*, *satya*, *dharma*, and *rta* are intrinsically interconnected, though their applied connotations are different.

As we have seen, in the Vedas *rta* has been identified with different ideas according to context. These different connotations are not contradictory but complementary in nature. Material sciences attempt to access *rta* from the perspective of the physical universe; the science of *yajna* is a similar pursuit from the perspective of religion; *rta* translated into social conduct is considered *dharma*; and the philosophical dimension of *rta* is called *satya*.

Creation is brought about through certain principles, although the Creator itself is beyond these principles. The fundamental principles underling this Creation, and also permeating it, are collectively called *rta*, which is one with the Divine. As quoted earlier, the way to power, peace, and goodness lies in abiding by *rta*, in observing those fundamental principles experienced by the sages and later recorded in the scriptures.

As *rta* is one with the Divine, for those who consider Sri Ramakrishna a manifestation of the Divine, he is *de facto* a personification of *rta*, the one who marks the path to *rta* and gives strength to follow that path. Swami Vivekananda says that Sri Ramakrishna is Om—the mystic, non-dual equivalent of Brahman; *brīm*, the creative Power associated with Brahman; and *rta*, the divine law operating in the universe.

(Continued on page 379)



*Cerulean Warbler,  
endangered species*

# ***Eco-awareness and Spirituality***

**Swami Atmajnananda**

**T**HE global industrial and communications revolutions coupled with market-based economies have led to a progressive quickening of the pace of life. Everybody seems to be short of time and in search of convenience products and fast foods. The latest cars, computers, and mobile phones are now both indispensable commodities as well as prestige enhancers. Pesticides and hormones have long been used indiscriminately to enhance agricultural production. Commercialization and human avarice have resulted in wastage of precious resources and hastened depletion of forest cover. Desertification is on the increase, and potable water is predicted to be a major issue of contention between countries in future. As human footprints cover virtually every corner of the globe—following the implicit assumption that the world is for humans to take—hundreds of other creatures have been systematically eliminated through wanton poaching and destruction of habitat. Increase in greenhouse gases and depletion of the ozone layer have set alarm bells ringing. Lopsided social development has widened the gap between haves and have-nots, adding to the incidence of crime, suicide, and discontent that plague all modern cities. These and many other similar issues have forced reflective individuals to sit up and re-think our ways of living and spending. Ecological awareness, as a determinant of quality of life, and our responsibility towards the global environment are two of the hottest topics of discussion today. Yet, despite the belligerent furore over the repercussions of ecological damage, perceptible changes in human behaviour are not widely evident. We seem to have missed something that is vital to the issue.

Many Indians have blamed colonial rule and Western influence for all these evils. In spite of

Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to popularize a rural economy and a simple lifestyle, in keeping with the traditional Indian ethos, a spurt in employment opportunities and middle class growth have created a spiralling demand for urban comforts and luxuries. Add to this the problems of an ever-increasing population and rampant corruption and you will despair of a way out of this imbroglio. Many thinkers—both Indian and Western—have blamed religion for much, if not all, of this mess. In their opinion, emphasizing the spirit amounts to neglect of matter.

## ***Is Religion to Blame?***

It cannot be denied that the world and its allurements have been seen as impediments to spiritual progress in all religious traditions. Denying the world as maya had probably entered the mainstream of Indian thought even in ancient times. All the same, austerity and endurance of physical hardships have been key features of every spiritual tradition. Ascetics have lived in forests and remote deserts to avoid human contact; they have derived inspiration from nature's sublime beauty and benevolence. The loftiest thoughts of Indian philosophy were discovered in such forest retreats, and even in these modern times spiritual aspirants seek to live amidst elevating natural settings. Sri Ramakrishna lived near Kolkata but had the privilege of seclusion in the gardens of Dakshineswar. Swami Vivekananda wanted an ashrama in the Himalayas to start the spiritual magazine that you are holding in your hands now. Thousands of pilgrims visit shrines in remote areas and thereby become aware of natural diversity. One could, of course, argue that pilgrim centres are now busy tourist spots and therefore hasten ecological damage through crowding, littering, pollution of water sources, and

thoughtless violation of flora and fauna.

Religion, when understood correctly and practised sincerely, must help in reducing ecological damage. But is religion a primary human pursuit today? True religion does not preach exploitation and selfishness. It does not encourage harming plant and animal life. Desecration of rivers and holy places are a result of apathy and can be remedied by concientizing people about its long-term effects, coupled with stringent laws to punish transgressors. We can probably undo the damage that we have wrought on this wonderful ecosystem if we educate ourselves to see the whole of Creation from a different perspective—a spiritual one—which was somehow, sometime, relegated to the back seat in our pursuit of physical comforts. Our predecessors, of all countries and races, were predominantly nature worshippers. They were awed by nature's splendours and terrified by her wrath. They were grateful to the Divine for everything bestowed and beseeched the Deity to protect them from dangers.

Western scholars have pointed out that in Semitic religions the idea of Creation and a creator God led to the selfish notion that God created everything else for humans to enjoy. The older oriental religions, on the other hand, had not stopped at enjoying the world and thanking God for all that he had provided. Based on their direct spiritual experience, the seers of Vedanta stated that all the inanimate things as well as animate beings that we perceive pulsate with the one Consciousness, and that the only variation is in the degree of its manifestation according to the density of the covering 'ignorance'. They warned that enjoyment can never have an end. These great minds realized the unity of existence and the interconnectedness of all that we perceive, and this spiritual vision made them compassionate, tolerant, and universal in outlook. They were happy with what little they had, found joy within themselves, and were a source of joy to all around. They concluded that this state of identity with all of Creation can be achieved by one and all; nay, that that is the purpose of the whole of existence and all life is trying to manifest the same divinity within. Further, with the know-

ledge of one's true Self, the truth hidden in nature also stands revealed, because Truth is one.

### **Are We Aware of Nature?**

An infant becomes aware of its surroundings within the first few months of its life. It begins to realize that there is something outside its own self, something that can be grasped, tasted, and used. It is constantly made to recognize objects, people, and other creatures by its parents, guardians, and acquaintances. Even a visually challenged child feels the world through such sensory inputs as touch and sound. As it develops a sense of ego and individuality over the first two years of life, the child keeps making sharper distinctions between the 'me-self' and external objects. It also learns to distinguish between one's own people and others. This discriminative behaviour gets progressively reinforced over the coming years. A selfish person tries to use everything and everybody to further one's own interests. Those who learn to relate to others and see them as their own become inclusive and perceive themselves as part of a universal whole. Masanobu Fukuoka, the author of *The One-Straw Revolution* says: 'It has become impossible for people to grasp anything in its entirety. ... That which is conceived to be nature is only the idea of nature arising in each person's mind. ... An object seen in isolation from the whole is not the real thing.'<sup>1</sup>

We are too preoccupied with the world and its concerns to actually notice nature. How many of us have the patience to watch a flower bloom, a small bird chirp, or a brook break into a melodious babble? We have forgotten the art of being aware of our

*Red Panda, endangered species*



surroundings, even of our own existence, and delight in living amidst pressures that alienate us not only from others but from ourselves too. Our awareness of things and people is too superficial and limited to the one or two ideas that we form about them from our momentary interactions. Our whole life seems to be revolving within frames, concepts, and stereotypes that we have built around us in the name of security, custom, religion, and so on. We are unable to rise above limitations and look at things impartially. How then can we acquire an integral vision?

### Nature as Teacher

The whole universe has come from one 'existence' and shall go back into it again, says Vedanta. Nor is this universe separate from its source, Brahman. The *Isha Upanishad* says: 'All this—whatsoever moves on earth—is permeated by God. ... The enlightened person, who perceives all beings as one with the Self and the Self as pervading every being, does not, by virtue of that realization, feel any animosity or aversion towards any being.'<sup>2</sup> Indian thought, imbued with deep spiritual insight, states that the entire sphere of experiential existence in all its aspects, internal as well as external, is one integral whole. It compares phenomenal existence to an ashwattha or pipal tree, whose roots are above in the infinite Reality and whose branches spread out below in the phenomenal universe. On attaining a state of identity with the whole of existence, by perceiving the numinous in objects and beings, the seer no longer distinguishes between the living and non-living, beautiful and ugly, good and bad. Such a person goes beyond all dualities; everything becomes sacred and wonderful for such a person.

Indian Rhino, endangered species



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The earth, plants and trees, birds and animals are all associated with God, and are worshipped as aspects of the same God in Hinduism. It is not that there are many gods, but all that exists is one in God, though appearing as many. The ancient Rig Veda has this beautiful prayer addressed to herbal deities: 'Ye, Mothers, have a hundred homes, and a thousand are your growths; do you who fulfil a hundred functions free this, my people, from disease.'<sup>3</sup> A popular prayer to Mother Earth that is taught to children induces respect for the seemingly inanimate earth which nourishes us:

*Samudra-rashane devi  
parvata-stana-mandale;  
Vishnu-patni namastubhyam  
pada-sparsham kshamasva me.*

O Goddess, who has the ocean as your girdle and the mountains as your breasts, the spouse of Vishnu, I bow down to you. Please forgive the touch of my feet.

A child that grows up uttering such prayers as it steps out of bed each day must necessarily become ecologically aware.

The *Mahanarayana Upanishad* contains suktas addressed to Mother Earth, to the *durva* grass, to the soil, *mriddika*, and to a host of other aspects of nature and of our daily life. Shiva is worshipped in the Vedas as the lord of the living, including ghosts and demons! During Durga Puja the Mother is bathed with water from rivers, streams, ponds, lakes, and seas. The names of major rivers are invoked while bathing the Mother. Mother Nature is being continually bathed by the rivers that she carries, and recalling this during worship helps in reinforcing the apprehension of the Divine behind all that is in nature. Wider participation in and comprehension of these ritual activities would encourage people to avoid polluting rivers and conserve precious water.

In the Bhagavata, the enlightened *avadhuta* mentions twenty-four of his teachers. These include natural elements—earth, fire, moon, sun, and the like—birds like the pigeon and the osprey, and such other creatures as the spider, the bee, the python, and the deer. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* narrates

the story of Satyakama who received instructions on Brahman from the bull, the fire, the swan, and the diver-bird, and of Upakosala who was taught by the sacrificial fires that he tended at his teacher's home. In the *Katha Upanishad*, Nachiketa is blessed with the highest knowledge by Yama, the lord of death. The *Aitareya Brahmana* testifies to the poignant story of Aitareya Mahidasa. A sage had two wives, one a brahmana woman and the other a shudra. The shudra mother sent her son to the sage when it was time for him to receive instructions. The sage neglected him and the boy came back crying to his mother. The mother prayed to Mother Earth and the boy received all instruction from the Earth who said: 'Do not fear, all knowledge is in my bosom; I shall teach you.' The boy grew up to be the sage Aitareya Mahidasa of the Rig Veda and dedicated the Brahmana and Aranyaka texts that he recorded to his mother Itara, 'the other one'.

Sri Krishna was born amidst the sylvan surroundings of Vrindaban and had great love for trees. Extolling their virtues, he exhorted his friends to emulate them: 'Friends, look at these noble trees which live entirely for the sake of others, themselves bearing all the rigours of wind, rain, heat, and dew, but protecting us from them. How covetable is their life, providing nourishment to all beings that come to them! No one seeking sustenance from them has to go away disappointed, just like needy people seeking help from good men. They fulfil the needs of beings with their leaves, flowers, fruits, shade, roots, bark, timber, sweet smelling sap, ashes, wood, and tender shoots. Man's life in this world is meaningful and fruitful only to the extent that his energies, wealth, intelligence, and speech are utilized for the welfare of others.'<sup>4</sup> In India rivers are also worshipped corporeally, as Mothers Ganga, Kaveri, Narmada, and so on. In the daily rituals of the Hindus there are many prayers to the gracious elements—to earth for providing a steady seat to the worshipper, to the waters for purification, to fire for protection from evil, and to the sun for energizing everything.

The Upanishads contain many *upasanas*, meditations, on the various forces and objects in na-

## The Beauty of Nature

In the distance, the range of Bababudangiri hills was visible. The sun was playing hide and seek with the clouds. The scenery was so pleasant that one could forget oneself. [Sri Mukunduru] Swamiji suddenly began to laugh. 'Hey, look, look. How beautiful it is. Look at him,' he pointed towards the clouds. 'Look at him, how colourful he is! Look at that elephant-faced one! There, he seems to be in a hurry to go somewhere! See that horse speeding away! Where did that elephant-faced one disappear? What was there a moment ago has become something else now. Is not the world too like this! What you see this moment you cannot see in the next. In such a world we say "I am the great", "I am the greatest", "look at my achievements".' He began to look around and was rapt in appreciating the beauty of the scenery. In fact, that day I learnt the art of appreciating the beauty of nature from him. —Yega Has It All, 5

ture. By trying to identify oneself with the object of meditation the aspirant realizes the universal behind the seemingly ephemeral object. Eckhart Tolle echoes this state of being in his book *Stillness Speaks*: 'You are not separate from nature. We are all part of the One Life that manifests itself in countless forms throughout the universe, forms that are all completely interconnected. When you recognize the sacredness, the beauty, the incredible stillness and dignity in which a flower or a tree exists, you add something to the flower or the tree. Through your recognition, your awareness, nature too comes to know itself. It comes to know its own beauty and sacredness through you!'<sup>5</sup>

## Perceiving Nature as Conscious

Sri Ramakrishna had his first experience of ecstasy when he saw a flock of white cranes flying in formation against the backdrop of dark clouds. Instantly his mind soared and merged in the divine beauty that was manifest in nature—the sight culminated in a spiritual experience. He never tired of pointing out the truth hidden in nature: 'When a man



*Golden Lion Tamarin,  
endangered species*

## *Prabuddha Bharata*

of the ultimate Reality.

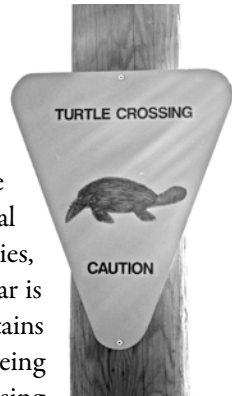
Swami Vivekananda too experienced the sublime in nature, even as a boy. Of a particularly vivid experience, while travelling to Raipur, he said later:

The slow-moving bullock-carts arrived at a place where two mountain peaks, coming forward as though in love, locked themselves in an embrace over the narrow forest path. Observing carefully below the meeting-points I saw that there was a very big cleft from the crest to the foot of the mountain on one side of the path; and filling that cleft, there was hanging in it an enormous honey-comb, the result of the bees' labour for ages. Filled with wonder, as I was pondering over the beginning and the end of that kingdom of bees, my mind became so much absorbed in the thought of the infinite power of God, the Controller of the three worlds, that I completely lost my consciousness of the external world for some time.<sup>7</sup>

He could well have had this experience in mind when he later said: 'If one cannot appreciate the harmony in nature, how can one appreciate God, the summation of all harmony, sublimity and beauty!'<sup>8</sup>

### **The Task before Us**

Having pointed out the deep reverence for nature that the Hindu faith propounds, one shudders to think of the ways in which nature is abused. The sacred Ganga is polluted with industrial and urban waste, half-cremated bodies, and a host of other pollutants. Similar is the plight of most other rivers. Mountains are being denuded and forest land being encroached upon by an ever-increasing population. The tribal populace, which has an affinity with nature, is being displaced and alien methods of conservation are being forced on people, often without any attempt to adapt them suitably to local conditions. Pollution levels are increasing alarmingly and governments have failed to check the offenders. A general apathy towards ecology is all too evident. Yet Indians engage in various pujas with great ceremony! This gap between belief and practice needs to be bridged. This calls for mass education, and it can



has true knowledge he feels that everything is filled with Consciousness. At Kāmārpukur I used to talk to Shibu, who was then a lad four or five years old. When the clouds rumbled and lightening flashed, Shibu would say to me: "There, uncle! They're striking matches again!" One day I noticed him chasing grasshoppers by himself. The leaves rustled in the near-by trees. "Hush! Hush!" he said to the leaves. "I want to catch the grasshoppers." He was a child and saw everything throbbing with consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Many incidents from the life of Sri Ramakrishna could be cited as examples of his total identity with the Reality manifest in nature. He was once hurt when somebody walked on the lawn—such was his identification with the grass! Though ascetic in his habits, he never despised the world. It was the lila of the Divine Mother, her play. He was like a child enjoying the game, seeing the same Mother everywhere. Standing on the threshold of the transcendental Reality, as a *vijnani*, he was aware of consciousness everywhere, within Creation as well as transcending it. The roof and the stairs leading to the roof are made of the same material and the reality of neither can be denied, he would say.

Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual consort, Sri Sarada Devi, shared with him the realization of the Divinity in its transcendent and immanent aspects. She forbade a novice from ill-treating a cat saying, 'Do not beat the cat. I dwell inside the cat too.' She would hasten to free a calf if she heard it crying piteously for its mother. She advised her attendants to be careful not to waste anything that could be used as food for some creature. These small incidents give us a glimpse into the mind of one who had broken through the veil of nature and yet accepted it as part

be achieved through media programmes and campaigns as well as by means of regular instructions in schools and colleges. It is also essential that legislatures enact stringent laws and the judiciary become more proactive to prevent ecological damage. If each individual can contribute by planting and nurturing trees, avoiding generation of plastic wastes and littering, and reducing dependence on personal vehicles, we can better our surroundings considerably.

We can draw inspiration from Thimmakka, who planted trees on roadsides in her village and nurtured them like her own children. The residents of Kokkare Belluru near Mandya have been tending to pelicans that roost there every year. They feed them with fish, protect them from predators, and care for the young fledglings if they happen to fall down from the trees. Manu, a nature activist, is energetically educating villagers about the benefits of such programmes. I am reminded of an incident that happened on the highway between Mysore and Bangaluru some time back. A car stopped by the roadside and two young men came out of the vehicle. They took aim at the ibises that were feeding in the paddy fields and shot down two of them. As soon as the gunshots were heard the farmers working in the nearby fields rushed out and nabbed the culprits. They were handed over to the police and the local dailies were all praise for the villagers. This is the type of awareness and vigilance required for conservation work. Kripakar and Senani, two wildlife enthusiasts, have painstakingly documented the life and habits of the dhole, an endangered wild dog species, for the *National Geographic*, tracking their movements and hunting

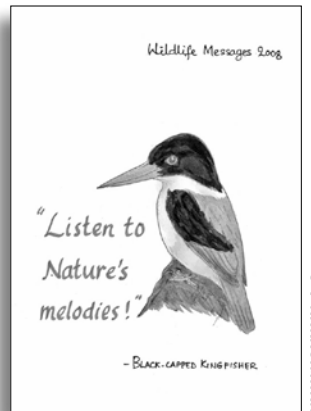
patterns in difficult terrain for decades. Dr S V Narasimhan of Virajpet, Coorg, has been silently spreading eco-awareness among people by sending them beautiful hand-painted cards, each with a 'wild-life message' on it. He has been doing this for the last twenty-four years, having

drawn over 50,000 cards which he has sent to more than 1,200 people. There are many individuals and NGOs in India and abroad trying to spread eco-awareness. It would be foolish to sit idle and let them slog for us. Let us try to make it a point to help such endeavours.

Sustainable eco-awareness in India is possible only through an awareness of its spiritual basis. If various religious organizations take up this issue in right earnest, we can hope to retain the forests that once gave us the lofty spiritual truths we profess. Contemplative living in the hustle and bustle of cities is a difficult proposition. We cannot do away with nature without annihilating ourselves. Nature lovers and activists have been trying relentlessly to protect nature from over-exploitation. It is our responsibility to bequeath a clean and enjoyable habitat to future generations. Merely looking upon all of Creation as divine and writing wonderful poetry will not suffice today. We have to be proactive and translate our beliefs into actions that help not only humanity but all creatures.

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Indian Dhole,  
endangered  
species





# Hindu Solutions to Deep Ecological Problems

Rhyddhi Chakraborty

MUCH work is currently being done by people from diverse disciplines to check the disintegration of the earth's ecological balance. But all such effort seems to get stuck with surface ecology, while the need is for correctives reaching deeper biophysical as well as existential levels. All the problems of surface ecology seem to have their roots in the hidden dimensions of deep ecology in the form of ignorance and negligence.<sup>1</sup> Our traditional religio-cultural heritage contains ample resources relevant to this context. It teaches us to admire nature and live in a healthy and harmonious relationship with it, according it proper respect and importance. In this article we shall take a brief look at the possible Hindu responses to the challenge of human-made ecological problems, which have now struck deep roots.

Deep ecological concerns are expressed in Hinduism through the conception of an underlying unity, the Reality, amidst the diversities of Mother Nature. Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma proclaims that only Ishvara, God, has absolute sovereignty over all creatures, including humans. It does not grant humans any absolute superiority over nature; rather, it proclaims that all living beings—flora or fauna, creatures of the sky or dwellers of the seas—are equally important and possess the same right of existence. Hinduism also suggests that the sacredness of God's Creation implies that no harm is to be inflicted on any living species without adequate ethical justification. Showing respect to all the elements of nature for the maintenance of a balanced ecosystem is an essential component of Hinduism. Here we shall look at the ecological concerns of Hinduism—both shallow and deep—and see how these are addressed in modern times. Next

we shall discuss how Hinduism invites us to train our minds to realize cosmic harmony and maintain age-old traditions by removing the prime obstacles to deep ecology—ignorance and negligence.

## Ecological Concerns and Crises

Traditional Hindu texts contain pragmatic advice on maintaining the traditional village ecology: natural water sources, tanks, reservoirs, and forests. The *Matsya Purana* says:

*Daśa-kūpa-samā vāpī daśa-vāpī-samo hradaḥ;  
Daśa-hrada-samaḥ putro daśa-putra-samo drumah.*

A pond is (to be viewed as) equivalent to ten wells, and a lake to ten ponds; a son is worth ten lakes, and a tree worth ten sons.<sup>2</sup>

Today the maintenance of traditional water sources has fallen into neglect. Mechanical pumps and piped water supply have created a distance between humans and their water sources. Inefficient water management is causing water crises in summers, and water-logging, flood, and water-related health hazards in the rainy season.

Hindus traditionally regard rivers as holy. The Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati have had a special place in the Indian mind since Vedic times. Of these, River Ganga is considered the holiest and is referred to as 'Mother Ganga'. It is said to have had a divine origin in Puranic times.<sup>3</sup> It finds mention in various Puranas, in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as well as in philosophical and literary works.<sup>4</sup> River Yamuna also finds mention in the Puranas. In Sri Krishna she found a saviour who rid her of the pollution caused by the venomous serpent Kaliya. Unfortunately, the fate of these rivers today is beyond description and is worsening by the

day. The Saraswati has dried up; Yamuna is no better than a sewage canal at Delhi; and Ganga, which meets the thirst of millions of people throughout its course from the Himalayas to Ganga-sagar and sustains one of the greatest agricultural systems of the world, has become highly polluted. Half of the pollutants in the Ganga are generated in Uttar Pradesh, with the city of Kanpur being the worst culprit. More worrisome is the fact that, with the rapid recession of Himalayan glaciers, its volume is steadily decreasing and it has been suggested that it could well turn into a monsoon river within a decade. Gomukh, the glacial source of the Ganga, is also threatening to disappear.

Human society depends on forests for many needs. Forests have been providing fodder, timber, and medicinal herbs. They comprise an ecosystem in themselves, providing shelter to numerous birds, animals, and plant species. In ancient India forests were places where spiritual goals were pursued.<sup>5</sup> There one hoped to find peace and maintain harmony with God and nature. Sages built their ashramas—centres of meditation and education—in forests and cared for the forest ecosystem, being aware of its significance. To them trees were symbols of patience and tolerance.<sup>6</sup> Hindu religious tradition mentions three kinds of forests: (i) *Śrīvāna*, providing prosperity and meeting needs, like the mango forest, generally looked after by temple managers; (ii) *Tapovana*, a place for contemplation, where sages sought the ultimate Truth; and (iii) *Mahāvāna*, the great natural forest, a shelter to all species of life. Thus, it may be said that the idea of reserve forest, which maintained all life forms, was prevalent in Vedic society. Vedic texts also have numerous references to trees and plants, including some with medicinal value. Such references suggest both ecological awareness and sensitivity to conservation.

The scenario has changed now. With growing commercialization and increased pace of living, people have forgotten to give importance to the green components of their lives. In the first quarter of a century after independence 71.5% of the forest cover in India was denuded. This has led to severe

soil erosion, flash floods, droughts, diminution in forest produce, and extinction of various animal and plant species. And we are still filling up wetlands and throwing garbage on green zones!

Apart from its concern for water bodies, trees, and forests, Hindu tradition encourages friendly relations with animals too. It has a tradition of symbolizing animals as protectors and companions of humans—the famous monkeys and bears of the Ramayana provide typical popular examples. Vishnu, who preserves and sustains life through the principle of *rta*, righteousness and truth, is said to have Garuda, the king of birds, as his constant companion. This farsighted mythical eagle has had the task of spreading the knowledge of the Vedas. His courage and speed provide the assurance of fearlessness in times of calamity. Today monkeys are having a hard time outside religious sanctuaries and many species of eagle have become rare and endangered. Interestingly, though monkeys are not harmed by many communities—some even go to the extent of ceremonially cremating dead monkeys—scarce attention is paid to conserving and developing their natural habitats, the forests.

Cows have always had a special place in the Hindu religious consciousness. Hindu mythology mentions that Surabhi, the wish-fulfilling cow, was the first treasure that emerged when the devas and *asuras* churned the ocean in search of the nectar of immortality. Cows are considered auspicious members of the household and are worshipped as mothers. India has the largest cattle holding in the world, though per capita milk yield is rather low. Cows are seen as providers of nourishment to humans and plants through milk and manure. With speedy urbanization the tradition of keeping domestic cows is dying out. The natural relation between cows and Mother Earth is also threatened. Increased use of artificial fertilizers in place of natural manure, inevitable in intensive multi-crop farming, has been causing top-soil degradation.

The Vedic literature reveals an awareness of the catastrophic results of exploiting the earth. Mother Earth, personified as Goddess Bhumi or Prithivi,

when treated kindly, supplies material wealth in abundance out of love and mercy for her children; but if mistreated, she responds with anger. The 'Bhumi Sukta' of the Atharva Veda addresses Mother Earth:

*Girayas-te parvatā himavanto'raṇyaṁ  
te prthivi syonamastu;  
Babhrum kṛṣṇāṁ rohinīm viśvarūpām  
dhruvām bhūmim prthivīm-indraguptām;  
Ajīto'hato akṣato'dhyaṣṭhām prthivīm-aham.*

Let your hills and snowy mountains, let your forest land, O Earth, be pleasant; upon the brown, black, red, all-formed, steady earth, the earth guarded by Indra, I, unharassed, unsmitten, unwounded, have stood.<sup>7</sup>

The seer declares: 'Mātā bhūmiḥ putro aham prthivyāḥ; the earth is my mother and I the son of the earth' (12.1.12). The text does not end with mere arousal of this awareness. It suggests that this awareness is to be reflected in appropriate practice; everybody must realize the emotional bond with Mother Earth, who is to be secured from all trespasses and oppression: 'Padbhyām dakṣiṇa-savyābhyām mā vyathiṣmahi bhūmyām; let us not cause pain to the earth by our feet, left and right' (12.1.28). Moreover, as we utilize her for our own needs, we should remain apologetic:

*Yat te bhūme vikhanāmi kṣipraṁ tadapi rohatu;  
Mā te marma bimṛgvari mā te hṛdayam-arpipam.*  
O Earth! Let whatever I dig out of you be filled over quickly; O purifier, let me not hit your vitals, nor your heart (12.1.29).

To the Vedic people the earth was sacred space, filled with plentiful and diverse resources, the stage for the play of human aspirations, calling for the practice of restraint and responsibility. The Hindu ceremony of *nāmakaraṇa*, naming the child, involves placing the child on a plot of land ceremonially purified with the feeling of '*vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*; the whole earth is one's family'. The Bhagavadgita tells us:

*Annād-bhavanti bhūtāni  
parjanyaād-anna-sambhavaḥ;  
Yajñād-bhavati parjanya  
yajñaḥ karma-samudbhavaḥ.*

From food are born the creatures, food originates from rain; rain comes from sacrifice, and sacrifice is born of action.<sup>8</sup>

This is the cycle of life. Implicit in the teachings of the Gita is the instruction not to waste or exploit resources for selfish ends, out of sensual urge or passion. With the speedy advance of mechanized civilization these implications and the underlying concepts and sentiments are being ignored, and nature is being put into grave danger.

In Hinduism worship of deities resident in the air, the water, the fire, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the earth are especially recommended as they are believed to be manifestations of Vishnu, the pervader and preserver.<sup>9</sup> To the followers of Vishnu it is out of his wish that all the other deities are born, as is the atmosphere conducive to maintenance of life. The entire cosmos is thus the body of the Supreme Being:

*Mattaḥ parataram nānyat-kiñcid-asti dhanañjaya;  
Mayi sarvam-idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇi-gaṇā iva.*

Beyond me, O Dhananjaya, there is naught. All this is strung on me, like pearls on a thread.

*Raso'ham-apsu kaunteya prabhā'smi śaśisūryayoh;  
Pranavaḥ sarva-vedeṣu śabdaḥ khe pauraṣaṁ nṛṣu.*

I am the savour of the waters, O son of Kunti; I, the radiance in the moon and the sun; I am the syllable Om in all the Vedas, sound in space, and manliness in men.<sup>10</sup>

These citations suggest that Hinduism, as a religious way of life, asks its followers to go beyond the apparent shallow surface-level ecological diversities. It suggests that care, love, and respect be accorded to even the subtle material elements, as they reflect the supreme power behind Creation. Violation of the cosmic rhythm through *adharma*, unethical living, invites disaster.

**How Do We Become Ecologically Sensitive?**

Hinduism always sought the Supreme Being underlying the different constituents of the world. The first Mandala of the Rig Veda is a vivid record of this search. Varuna is the god of night and of the blue sky; Agni, the fire-god, is the friend of all; Savitri is the glorious goddess; Indra, the master of the universe; Vishnu, the sustainer of the three worlds; Aditi, the mother of all other gods; Mitra, the constant companion of Varuna, is the god of day and light. It would appear that with so many controllers of the ecosystem there would be pandemonium; people would be at a loss to know who they are to worship for cosmic peace and harmony, whose path is to be followed to get rid of suffering, and which natural element is to be given maximal importance. But the sage Dirgatamas announced:

*Indraṁ mitraṁ varuṇam-agnim-āhur-  
atho divyaḥ sa suparṇo garutmān;  
Ekaṁ sad-viprā bahudhā vadanty-  
agnim yamaṁ mātariśvānam-āhuḥ.*

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni; and he is the heavenly noble-winged Garutman. To what is one, sages give many a name—they call it Agni, Yama, Matarishvan.<sup>11</sup>

Another rishi declared in an equally emphatic tone:

*Hiranyagarbhaḥ samavartatāgre  
bhūtasya jātaḥ patireka āsit;  
Sa dādhāra prthivīm dyāmutemām  
kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema.*

In the beginning rose Hiranyagarbha, the sole lord of all created beings, when born; he upheld the earth and the heavens, what (other) god shall we adore with our oblations?

*Ya ātmadā baladā yasya viśva  
upāsate praśiṣaṁ yasya devāḥ;  
Yasya chāyāmṛtaṁ yasya mṛtyuḥ  
kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema.*

(He is) the giver of vital breath, of power and vigour, whose commands all gods acknowledge; the lord of death, whose shade is life immortal,

what (other) god shall we adore with our oblations? (10.121.1–2).

This first-born being, though unseen, is the soul of all creatures:

*Ko dadarśa prathamam jāyamānam-  
asthanvantam yadanasthā vibharti;  
Bhūmyā asura-sṛg-ātmā kva svit  
ko vidvāmsam-upa gāt praṣṭum-etat.*

Who has seen the first born at the time of its birth, seen how the boneless one supports the bony? Where is the blood of the earth, the life, the spirit? Who may approach the sage who knows to ask this? (1.164.4).

Thus, the Vedic seers were quick to apprehend the unity underlying the diversity in the universe in the person of Hiranyagarbha, or Prajapati, and later in the concept of Brahman of the Upanishads. Closely related to this line of thought is the principle of *ṛta*—literally, the course of things—whose custodian is Varuna. According to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *ṛta* originally meant the ‘established route of the world, of the sun, moon and stars, morning and evening, day and night’.<sup>12</sup> *Ṛta* is the cosmic order, which guides the entire workings of the universe including the lives of individual human beings. *Ṛta* is also the psychological principle which urges humans to lead a moral life in harmony with Creation. Thus, this single overarching principle of *ṛta* integrates chaos into cosmos, brings order to the universe, and shows the righteous path for humans to follow.

It is in the last sense—moral order—that *ṛta* came to be known in later times as dharma. Dharma implies duty, non-performance of which leads to demerit. Dharma also refers to virtue.<sup>13</sup> In this sense the *Yajñavalkya Smṛiti* mentions the nine dharmas of non-injury, truthfulness, honesty, cleanliness, control of the senses, charity, self-restraint, love, and forbearance:

*Ahimsā satyam-asteyam  
śaucam-indriya-nigrahaḥ;  
Dānam damo dayā kṣāntiḥ  
sarveṣāṁ dharma-sādhanam.*<sup>14</sup>

Manu also mentions ten general characteristics of dharma:

*Daśa-lakṣaṇako dharmah  
sevitavyah prayatnatah.  
Dhṛtiḥ kṣamā damo'steyam  
śaucam-indriya-nigrahaḥ;  
Dhīr-vidyā satyam-akrodho  
daśakam dharma-lakṣaṇam.*

Dharma, marked by ten characteristics, is to be cultivated with care. Fortitude, forgiveness, restraint, abstention from wrongly appropriating another's property, purity, control over the senses, insight, knowledge, truthfulness, and absence of anger—these are the ten features of dharma.<sup>15</sup>

The *Chhandogya Upanishad* lists sacrifice, study, charity, austerity, and brahmacharya as the components of dharma.<sup>16</sup> The Gita's list of virtues includes fearlessness, honesty, truthfulness, absence of hatred and anger, non-injury, simplicity, kindness to creatures, gentleness, modesty, freedom from restlessness, peace, fortitude, austerity, detachment, and equanimity.<sup>17</sup>

These values are also referred to as *sādhāraṇa dharma*, virtues that can be practised by all. When cultivated assiduously, through proper understanding and training, these can help one eradicate harmful mental habits, gain control over one's senses, mind, and will, and fruitfully direct one's desires and passions. Having gained control of one's mind, one can easily uproot the deep-rooted ignorance that leads to an uncaring attitude towards nature and its creatures. One can then easily transform one's bodily attitudes too.

The method of practising these values is best represented in the Indian yoga tradition. Patanjali's systematization of the yoga tradition begins with *yama*, restraints, and *niyama*, code of conduct. Patanjali says: '*Ahimsā-satyāsteya-brahmacaryāparigraha yamāḥ*; non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-acceptance of gifts are the restraints.'<sup>18</sup> Further, these become great or universal vows when they are practised 'irrespective of considerations of class, place, time, or purpose' (2.31). The entire *Yoga Sutra* is a treatise on mastering the mind, cultivating

healthy mental habits, and realizing one's true self and the place and purpose of nature in our lives.

Hinduism suggests that at a certain deeper level of experience one can realize one's harmonious relation with nature and dismantle the obstacles of ignorance and negligence. But this involves cultivation of proper attitudes and practices. Only when we have gained control over our thought and action can we understand the true implication of the above values in uprooting the internal disorder that forces us into unhealthy relationships with nature. Environmental concerns are part and parcel of Hindu thought, though this is not adequately reflected in contemporary society for a number of reasons. Hinduism invites us to realize our deep relationship with nature and to perform actions in accord with the universal law of harmony through healthy minds and bodies. It suggests possible ways to train the mind to shed ignorance and negligence, the prime detractors of both shallow and deep ecology. Hence, Hinduism can be said to suggest one of the best possible measures to combat deep ecological problems. This, however, is subject to a proper knowledge of the Hindu religio-cultural tradition and a proper application of its injunctions.



## Notes and References

1. The term 'deep ecology' was first used by Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss (1912–2009) in 1973. According to him, the failure of the ecological sciences lies in their inability to show ethical ways of living. The modern era needs ethical wisdom to deal with environmental crises. It is deep ecological concern which provides and develops this wisdom by constituting an interconnected system of deep experience, deep questioning, and deep commitment. Therefore, Næss preferred to coin a new term 'deep ecosophy' to replace 'deep ecology'.
2. *Matsya Purana*, 154.512.
3. According to Puranic tradition, River Ganga originated from the washings of Vishnu's feet—in his incarnation as Vamana, the dwarf—collected by Brahma in his *kamaṇḍala*, water pot. So Ganga is also called *viṣṇu-padī*, born of Vishnu's feet. Later, being pleased with the worship King Bhagiratha, a descendant of King Sagara, Brahma released Ganga from his *kamaṇḍala*, only to see it disap-

pear in the matted locks of Shiva, who had deigned to receive it on his head as it descended on earth. Bhagiratha then proceeded to worship Shiva for several years, had Ganga released from his locks, and led her towards the ocean. On the way it happened to destroy the hermitage of Sage Janhu, who drank the entire river out of anger. Bhagiratha had to propitiate Janhu to get Ganga back on course and lead her to the Bay of Bengal at Ganga-sagar. Before merging into the sea, Ganga accepted the ashes of Sagara's sons—sixty thousand of them—who had been burnt by the wrath of Kapila Muni, whom they had disparaged. Ganga thus granted peace to these departed souls, an act she continues to repeat for other mortals to this day.

4. In the Mahabharata Ganga is King Shantanu's wife and Bhishma's mother. In the Ramayana she is referred to as *tripathagā*, 'coursing through the three worlds'. That this river has had a central place in the lives of numerous Indians is indicated by reference to it in such philosophical texts as the *Tarkasangraha-dīpika* and *Vedānta-sāra*. These texts speak of '*gangāyām ghoṣaḥ*, the habitation of the cowherds on the Ganga' in course of elucidation of *lakṣaṇā*, implied meaning.
5. The ethical tradition of the Upanishads sets the attainment of liberation as the ultimate human end. In preparation for this goal, duties of one's varṇa, caste, and āśrama, station in life, are enjoined. After having lead the life of the Grihastha, householder, one is to retire to a forest and lead a solitary life of meditation and prayer. This is called Vana-prastha. Lastly, one is to live as a recluse or a wandering monk, sannyasin, fully dedicated to God and depending on what chance may bring. Forests thus have an important role in the schema of an ideal, harmonious, and well-balanced Hindu life.
6. See for instance Bhagavata, 10.22.29–35. This records the story of Krishna's great love for trees.
7. Atharva Veda, 12.1.11.
8. Bhagavadgita, 3.14. In this context the term *yajña* denotes not the sacrificial deeds but the subtle principle—technically called *apūrva*—which arises out of sacrifice and links the sacrifice to its fruits at a later time.
9. Terrestrial Vedic deities include Prithivi, earth, Agni, fire, and Soma; atmospheric deities include Indra, Rudra, the Maruts, and Parjanya. Other deities like Dyaus, sky; Varuna, the lord of the sky, and later of the ocean; Mitra, Savitri, and Pushan, identified with the Sun; Ushas, dawn; and Ratri, night, were also intimately connected with nature. In Puranic times these deities got largely assimilated in the

triumvirate of Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi.

10. Gita, 7.7–8.
11. Rig Veda, 1.164.46.
12. S Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2006), 1.79.
13. The word 'dharma' is derived from the root *dhṛ*. It means 'that which sustains or maintains'. It may also mean ethical duty, cosmic moral order, the essential functions of things, or the ultimate elements of things (as in early Buddhism).
14. *Yajñavalkya Smṛiti*, 1.122.
15. *Manu Smṛiti*, 6.91–2.
16. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 2.23.1.
17. See Gita, 12.13–19; 16.1–3.
18. *Yoga Sutra*, 2.30.

(Continued from page 367)

The practical aspect of this philosophical conception evolves in an integrated process of sadhana. The constant attempt to adjust, to attune oneself to *rta* in every action is known as karma yoga; the identification with Om, the sound-symbol of the Real—an identification that in itself rejects the unreal—is the practice of jñāna yoga; and *hrīm*, the mystical syllable associated with the human representation of the Divine, is the *bīja-mantra* that arouses devotion in the longing soul—being intimately related to it is the path of bhakti yoga. *Om hrīm ṛtam* is not only a philosophically profound statement, it also leads to spiritual awakening.

The way to the principle that is Sri Ramakrishna, therefore, lies in holding on to *rta* and being upright and attuned to the universe, to flow with Om and discriminate between the Real and the unreal, and to surrender to *hrīm* and manifest the creative Power lying in the heart.



## References

1. Rig Veda, 1.1.8.
2. Atharva Veda, 12.1.1.
3. Yajur Veda, 19.30.
4. Rig Veda, 10.190.1.
5. *Eight Upaniṣads*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 1.247.
6. Yajur Veda, 9.39.
7. Rig Veda, 10.31.2.
8. Yajur Veda, 10.24 and Rig Veda, 4.40.5.



# ***Blending Scientific Spirit and Spirituality for Sustainable Development***

**Dr TV Muralivallabhan**

**H**UMANITY is trapped in a crisis involving the physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of existence. And the crisis is of a scale and urgency unprecedented in recorded human history: for the first time we are living under the very real and persistent threat of extinction of all life forms on this planet. Science can do a lot to rescue humanity from this trap. Science is the quest of the human mind to understand truth. Pure science tries to understand nature and life through dispassionate empirical and rational enquiry, while the applied sciences use the discoveries of pure science in technical innovations for the provision of human necessities, comforts, and luxuries. Science is the architect of modern amenities as well as the progenitor of many contemporary problems. Therefore, the scientific attitude has an important role to play in solving the current ecological crises and mitigating the adverse impact of modern development. But science—which has

had a role in creating this predicament in the first place—alone is not enough. Spirituality has a vital say in this regard, for it is one's attitude of mind that is the ultimate determinant of all action.

## ***Adverse Impact of Modern Development***

The technological and communications developments of the last century have put humans on the horns of a dilemma: whether it is wise to proceed with the present manner of growth. For example, the preliminary results of a research on the link between noise and stress, released by the World Health Organization in August 2007, suggest that long term exposure to noise from traffic alone could be responsible for hundreds of thousands of death around the world every year through ischemic heart disease, besides contributing to strokes, high blood pressure, tinnitus, disturbed sleep, and other stress-related illnesses. Noise, researchers found, raises the levels of stress hormones even while one is asleep.



Noise levels are rising all over the world.

The extensive use that fossil fuels are being put to meet our diverse and ever-increasing energy demands is another case in point. To an alien observer it would appear that the primary purpose of economic growth is to find ever more intrusive means of burning fossil fuels! Atmospheric pollution and global warming are the direct consequences of this proclivity.

The environment we live in is a sophisticated dynamic system that is becoming increasingly complicated through human interference. Paradoxically, this 'complication' is often the result of a reduction in complexity and diversity, as has been happening with the extinction of plant and animal species. UN agencies, like the UNEP, UNDP and UNESCO, along with various NGOs, like World Watch Institute and Green Peace International, have brought to light some dark realities regarding the deteriorated state of our ecosystem. These agencies remind us that the continued adverse impact of inappropriate use of resources is turning problems into crises. Finding solutions for problems is easy, but not for crises. Global warming is no more a problem; it has assumed the proportions of a crisis. Ozone depletion, climate change, pollution of air, water, soil, food and mind, deforestation, desertification, loss of biodiversity, toxic and electronic waste, and the risk of a nuclear fallout are no more problems that can be tackled easily, these are crises that have us groping for solutions.

This has raised some very pertinent questions:

The massive improvements in human welfare—better housing, better nutrition, better sanitation and better medicine—over the past 200 years are the result of economic growth and the learning, spending, innovation and political empowerment it has permitted. But at what point should it stop? In other words, at what point do governments decide that the marginal costs of further growth exceed the marginal benefits?<sup>1</sup>

Modern economic theories recognize the importance of human-generated capital in economic development and provide for its depreciation in making

predictions and recommendations. But no such corrections are made while accounting for natural resources. When forest resources are exploited, little effort is spent in estimating the loss to an irreplaceable asset. Similarly, no allowance is made for the loss of top-soil resulting from extended cultivation.

Obsession with growth has been one of the important characteristics of both the capitalist and erstwhile socialist economies. Economic and technological growth is seen as an essential requirement by virtually all economists and politicians, although it should be abundantly clear by now that unlimited expansion in a finite environment can only lead to disaster. Modern growth is reflected in competitive consumption and is measured by the standard of living of a rapidly increasing population. But these indicators do not reflect the adverse impact on the total stock of the planet's resources and the associated environmental degradation. Thus, the concept of economic growth and development has long been demanding a reorientation. E F Schumacher explained this situation in the following words: 'There is a measure in all natural things—in their size, speed, and violence. As a result, the system of nature, of which man is a part, tends to be self-balancing, self-adjusting, self-cleansing. ... Technology recognizes no self-limiting principle—in terms, for instance, of size, speed or violence. ... In the subtle system of nature, technology, and in particular super-technology of the modern world, acts like a foreign body, and there are now numerous signs of rejection.'<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this new awakening, development experts have put forward two cardinal tests of efficacy applicable to any development model: social equability and sustainability. The accessibility and attainability of the fruits of development for the maximum number of people in the near future, if not now, is a pre-requisite for any welfare-oriented development model.

### ***Sustainable Development and the Scientific Spirit***

Sustainable development provides a healthy model of progress applicable across the globe. It involves

the economic management of ecological resources to reach an optimum level of use and satisfaction, instead of aiming at maximal exploitation. In its report 'Our Common Future', the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainable development as 'the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.<sup>3</sup> The concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority ought to be given, and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organizations on the environment's ability to meet present and future need, are discussed in detail in this report.

It is now well-recognized that all development efforts in every country, irrespective of their current material development, are to be defined in terms of sustainability. We need to remember what Mahatma Gandhi told us long back: that the world has enough resources to satisfy everyone's needs but not anyone's greed. As development involves a progressive transformation of society in all aspects, sustainable development implies uninterrupted improvement in social, economic, political, ethical, educational, scientific, technological, and spiritual conditions. It is thus an all-round human development, integrated and holistic.

The spirit of enquiry is the hallmark of science. Therefore science and technology, by their very nature, are bound to play a prominent role in addressing our present ecological problems. It is only through scientific studies that issues like the global climate change have been apprehended in depth. Oceanographers are engaged in finding out how coral reefs are being bleached by changes in oceanic environment. They are also monitoring the impact of global warming on sea levels. Glaciologists have been recording the shrinkage of polar ice caps and Himalayan glaciers. Agricultural scientists are seriously documenting the effect of pesticides on topsoil quality. Technologists are busy developing eco-friendly equipment such as windmills and solar lamps. Zoologists and botanists have joined hands

with environmental activists in raising alarm over the loss of biodiversity and are engaged in promoting more effective conservation methods. Physiologists and dieticians are researching the adverse effects of unhealthy urban food habits and are prescribing diets and medicines to meet the epidemics of obesity and malnutrition. Economists and sociologists are assessing the socio-economic impact of environmental hazards. Thus, science and technology are busy healing the very wounds that their misuse has inflicted on the ecosphere.

Till the middle of the last century, through modernization and industrialization, science and technology acted as disguised agents of the darker sides of economic growth. In today's postmodern world, with its non-reductionist spirit of enquiry, these twin agents of development could play the role of saviour of humanity as well.

In the ultimate analysis it is human attitude towards nature that is going to determine the fate of the planet and its life system, and this attitude is nurtured by individual as well as social culture. Of the several elements involved in the formation of culture, spiritual awareness is particularly important. This in turn is influenced by one's religious beliefs and practices.

The knowledge of the inherent unity of nature—which is largely camouflaged by its rich diversity—and an awareness of oneness with nature form the foundations of spirituality. According to Mahatma Gandhi, civilization meant not the multiplication of needs, but the deliberate and voluntary reduction of selfish wants. Eradication of poverty and hunger is not merely an intellectual exercise of science, technology, or economics; it also involves inner change. To alter the system, it is necessary to alter the paradigm of development and to take cognizance of our spiritual dimensions, of the inner voice, of the ethics and values that promote sustainable development. Swami Vivekananda reminds us:

Man is man so long as he is struggling to rise above nature, and this nature is both internal and external. Not only does it comprise the laws that govern

the particles of matter outside us and in our bodies, but also the more subtle nature within, which is, in fact, the motive power governing the external. It is good and very grand to conquer external nature, but grander still to conquer our internal nature. It is grand and good to know the laws that govern the stars and planets; it is infinitely grander and better to know the laws that govern the passions, the feelings, the will, of mankind. ... Human nature—the ordinary human nature, I mean—wants to see big material facts. The ordinary man cannot understand anything that is subtle. Well has it been said that the masses admire the lion that kills a thousand lambs, never for a moment thinking that it is death to the lambs, although a momentary triumph for the lion.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Education for Sustainable Development***

Understanding our internal nature through spirituality and the external nature through science, and blending the two to attain sustainable development ought to be a vital aim of modern university education. In order to solve the global problems with their intense local ramifications, holistic and interdisciplinary research is essential at university level. Taking this into consideration the UN has declared 2005–2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). According to the Draft International Implementation Scheme prepared by the UNESCO, ‘the basic vision of DESD is a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.’<sup>5</sup> To achieve this end education at university level should help foster wisdom, which goes beyond mere information and knowledge. Neither the head, the intellectual dimension, nor the heart, the emotional being, will suffice in isolation; only a combination of both will be able to enhance the value of our individual and social assets. Only the wise in society are able to apprehend the oneness and interdependence—unity in diversity—underpinning our social existence. And caring for nature is the crux of sustainable development.

Real education is ‘not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life’, warns Swami Vivekananda; ‘we must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas’. Moreover, ‘true education is gained by constant living in communion with nature.’<sup>6</sup> Education takes place at three levels: that of information, knowledge, and wisdom. And all three need to be suitably oriented for eco-sensitive learning.

***Education at Information Level*** • Information is about facts and data, about the name, form, number, dates of importance, and such other details of a particular person, thing, or incident. By its very nature it is superficial. Intricate interrelations and innate reality are not reflected through information alone. The size of a population, its birth and death rates, and sex ratio constitute information. The different types of plastic bags and their availability are also a matter of information. This web of information is represented through empirical data. A sizeable portion of the syllabi in Indian universities emphasizes information even in this age of the Internet. Information is important. But unfortunately it does not always induce a person to conduct in-depth studies to explore the interrelations underlying empirical data.

***At Knowledge Level*** • When the elements of information are related to their causes and effects, knowledge sets in. If the size of India’s population is a piece of information, the understanding of the causes of population growth and its impact on development constitute knowledge. The population policies of the government, voluntary organizations, and people at large are based on this knowledge. Knowledge in its theoretical and applied aspects is crucial to all planning and policy implementation. In our present system of university education knowledge is often limited to disciplinary boundaries. The acquisition of knowledge takes place within artificial compartments that are not all interconnected. For both teachers and students there is a wide gap between physics and metaphysics, between economics and meta-economics.

**At Wisdom Level** • Human wisdom encompasses both information and knowledge and also goes beyond these two levels. If historical, analytical-deductive, and experimental-inductive methods have been broadening the frontiers of our knowledge, wisdom calls for holistic, integrated studies and the development of intuition. Information and knowledge centre around mechanistic, reductionist, and atomistic research whereas wisdom depends on holistic, organic, and ecological studies. In late twentieth-century science the holistic perspective came to be known as 'systems thinking':

In the shift from mechanistic thinking to systems thinking, the relationship between the parts and the whole has been reversed. Cartesian science believed that in any complex system, the behavior of the whole could be analyzed in terms of its parts. Systems science shows that living systems cannot be understood by analysis. The properties of the parts are not intrinsic properties but can be understood only within the context of the larger whole. Thus systems thinking is 'contextual' thinking; and since explaining things in terms of their context means explaining them in terms of their environment, we can also say that systems thinking is environmental thinking.<sup>7</sup>


Wisdom demands the realization of reality beyond space and time. It equips a person to project knowledge to the future. It helps expand vision beyond geographical, political, social, and communal considerations. As they take into account the total context, wise decisions are also likely to be more judicious. Wisdom helps to take decisions for the coming generations, not merely for the next general elections. Wisdom proposes multidisciplinary studies, which are essential for sustainable development, and practices that involve environmental protection while promoting development. Wisdom is, therefore, the universal cornerstone for university education in sustainable development.

### **Education in Sustainability**

Teaching and learning, research, and extension services are the three main activities in Indian univer-

sities. These activities need to be so devised as to incorporate information, knowledge, and wisdom in right proportions. For degree courses, information-oriented learning can be promoted in the first year; in the second, knowledge-oriented study; and in the third, wisdom-oriented programmes. Students can thus develop the capacity to view and understand nature and follow scientific and spiritual truths in an integrated and holistic manner.

At postgraduate level, the education process should be largely knowledge-oriented. The motives and impact of diverse human activities ought to be studied by students of every discipline. Provisions for interdisciplinary understanding and interrelationship of various subjects could also be built into various syllabi. This stage is a stepping stone to basic and applied research. All research activity must integrate the information and knowledge gained at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and must also reflect wisdom. This would mean carrying out projection studies about future trends of various human activities. Policy makers and planners could then use this research to chalk out appropriate development programmes. Such studies in sustainable development are relevant both globally and locally.

When in our universities learning, teaching, and research would be carried out in the higher zone of wisdom, sustainable development would not be a distant destination. 

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# Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Shivananda

THERE is no doubt that to the extent that one studies the life of the world-famous Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadeva, to that extent will one progress on the path of faith, devotion, love and service.

It was in 1879 or 1880 that I, through my good fortune, had Sri Ramakrishna's darshan and received his grace. I first saw Paramahamsadeva at the house of his great householder devotee Dr Ramchandra Datta, at Madhu Roy street in Simulia, Kolkata. Ram-babu was related to Swami Vivekananda—then called Narendranath Dutta—being a grand-uncle of his. Swamiji's house was on Gourmohan Mukherjee lane, very near Madhu Roy street. That day the devout Ramchandra had brought Paramahamsadeva to his home and also invited many devotees to celebrate a religious festival. That was the first time I saw Paramahamsadeva and his few devotees of that time. It was also probably the first time I saw Narendra-babu among the devotees. Be that as it may, as I started frequenting Dakshineswar, I began to get acquainted with Paramahamsadeva and his devotees. My friendship with Swamiji also started deepening. In those days the devotees used to meet daily at Ram-babu's house, taking part in discussions on the life and teachings of Paramahamsadeva, in singing kirtans, and in other devotional activities. My yearning to live permanently among the Paramahamsadeva's

devotees grew stronger. Noticing this, one day in Dakshineswar when Ram-babu and many other devotees were present, Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] called Ram-babu and said to him: 'See Ram, Tarak (my pre-monastic name) will stay in your home. He is very eager to have the constant association of my devotees.' Ram-babu agreed, and asked me to live in his home from that very day; I too started staying at his house from that day.

Now I had the opportunity to meet and interact with Swamiji off and on; the more I got to know him, the more I started seeing that he was very great. Moreover, when I had occasion to see Swamiji in Thakur's presence at Dakshineswar, I gradually started realizing how highly and deeply Thakur loved him. By Thakur's grace I had renounced the world; and Swamiji too gradually cut off all worldly ties through Thakur's grace; but Swamiji's strength, energy, and vigour shone so brightly that I felt like a faint star next to the full moon that was Swamiji. When Thakur was lying ill at Kashipur, it was Swamiji who gathered us brother disciples and engaged us in service to Thakur. We too undertook this service wholeheartedly under his leadership and also carried on intense scriptural study and spiritual practices at the same time.

Empathizing with others' sorrow was in Swamiji's very nature; this was evident even in his childhood. After his father's death his family was in dire straits; but his friends and acquaintances were so greatly impressed by his many noble qualities that they tried to help him meet his family needs, openly or anonymously. Yet it would often so happen that, while returning home with a little money that would provide his family's next meal, Swamiji would meet some friends on the way and learning about their financial difficulties hand them all

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This is the English rendition of Swami Shivananda's introduction to *Vivekananda Charit*, Mahendranath Chaudhuri's Bengali biography of Swami Vivekananda, published in 1326 BE. The translation is based on a reprint available in the Vivekananda centenary memorial edition of *Sandipan*, the journal of the Ramakrishna Mission Shikshanamandira, Belur.

the money, himself returning home empty-handed. His mother would ask: 'Bile (Swamiji's pet name), did you not bring any money today? Did you not get anything at all today?' Swamiji would reply: 'Please manage somehow; I couldn't get anything today.' But then, by the Lord's grace, some money would come from somewhere and Swamiji would say to his mother, 'Here, take this.' Such happenings were frequent.

One such incident occurred when we were all serving Thakur at Kashipur garden-house. One day our brother disciple Swami Yogananda (his name then was Yogindranath Roy Choudhury, and his home was in Dakshineswar) said to Swamiji: 'Brother Naren, a woman of our village has been widowed; she has a couple of children, is very poor, and has none to support her. She is suffering much and both she and her children will be in big trouble if she doesn't get thirty rupees immediately.' Swamiji became very worried. Most of us were school students [*sic*] then, few of us had any money. I had some money in a savings bank account. Swamiji said to me: 'Brother Tarak, you are a monk. What will you do with money? That poor woman needs thirty rupees. Please withdraw thirty rupees from your account and bring it over right now. Otherwise, we shall have to collect thirty rupees by whatever means and rescue this poor widow from impending trouble; this we shall certainly do.' Willingly I withdrew the required amount and handed it over to Swamiji, who immediately sent it to Swami Yogananda at Dakshineswar. These incidents are illustrative of the compassionate heart that Swamiji had while he was still young. And now, all India—nay, the whole world—is coming to know how, in course of time, his compassion spread out and is continuing to grow.

During the time when we were engaged in Thakur's service at Kashipur, the study of Vedanta turned so intense and the spirit of renunciation grew so strong that suddenly, one day, Swamiji took me and brother Kali (Swami Abhedananda, who is now in America) along and, without mentioning it to Thakur, left secretly for Bodh Gaya, the

place where Lord Buddha—the embodiment of knowledge and renunciation—had performed austerities and attained illumination. Reaching there, Swamiji sat down at the site of Buddha's illumination [under the sacred Bodhi tree] and entered into deep meditation. We too sat in meditation on either side. Following a spell of deep meditation, Swamiji suddenly started sobbing like a child and later, crying loudly, embraced me; then he plunged again into meditation. Later, after he had emerged from his meditation, when I asked him about the reason for his weeping, he said: 'While meditating, it occurred to my mind how, in the quest of knowledge, that great teacher Buddha left his kingdom, parents, queen, and child and, renouncing everything, engaged himself in severe austerities and merged into samadhi. "Ah, where! Where is that great soul? Why don't I see him?"—as soon as this keen sense of separation [from Lord Buddha] appeared in my mind I got into the state.'

After spending three days in meditation and other spiritual practices as well as in visiting places near Bodh Gaya, bathing in the river Phalgu, and so forth, we returned to the Kashipur garden-house. On return we heard that Thakur had become very worried at Swamiji's going away without informing him, and our brother monks had also been extremely anxious. When all of them expressed their sorrow to Thakur, he had said: 'Just as a bird on the mast of a ship returns to the mast after flying about for some time, Narendra also will soon come back here after his wanderings. Don't worry.' And so did it come to pass; all of us returned to Kashipur garden-house on the fourth day.

After Thakur left his body, Swamiji became very concerned for his brother disciples. All of us were without any means of support; yet, having lived together and served Thakur for so long, we were now united by a strong tie of brotherhood difficult to break. Eleven or twelve days after Thakur's passing away, I left for Vrindaban. Holy Mother [Sri Sarada Devi], went to Vrindaban accompanied by two women devotees and Swamis Adbhutananda and Yogananda. All stayed in a house belonging to

Balaram Bose, a close devotee of Thakur.

Meanwhile, in Calcutta, Swamiji was frantically searching for a place where all of us brother disciples could take shelter and, spending our time in spiritual practices and scriptural study in solitude, could attain the Self-knowledge which Thakur had taught us to be the ultimate goal of human life. By the grace of Thakur, one of his rich householder devotees, Surendranath Mitra, whose house was near Swamiji's, suddenly came to him one day and said with tears in his eyes, 'Naren, will you grant me a special favour?' 'Of course!' Swamiji replied, 'We'll do anything for you. How much money you have spent for the Master and how much you've served him!' Suren-babu said: 'Thakur seems to be telling me: "Suren! What are you doing? Where have all these devotees of mine who served me so much gone—all pitifully scattered? Gather them together in one place and help them attain the goal of life." So I beg you to gather all the young disciples who served the Master, wherever they may be. Take a house at a low rent in some secluded place between Dakshineswar and Kolkata and get them all together there.'

Swamiji replied: 'For the last several days I too have been wondering how to bring all the young disciples together; and now, by the will of the Lord, you come to show the way. I'll set to work today itself.' The very next day Swamiji called Bhavanath Chattopadhyay—his close friend and a disciple particularly dear to Thakur—and arranged to rent a house [at Baranagar]. The house was very old and belonged to the Munshis, the zamindars of Taki. One of the rooms housed the library of the self-improvement association, *Atmonnati Vidhayini Sabha*, run by Bhavanath-babu's group, and the association's meetings were also occasionally held there. Our monastery was established in the remaining five or six rooms. [The image of] Thakur was installed there, and we too gathered at the house from different places; Swamiji was largely relieved of his anxiety. We started engaging ourselves in sadhana, austerities, bhajans, kirtans, study of the scriptures, and the like, in right earnest.

After living for some time in that spirit, Swamiji felt an urge to practise austerities in the Himalayas. Taking one or two brother disciples with him, he left for tapasya in the Himalayas. At this time, Swamiji, I, and one or two other brother disciples went to Varanasi and practised austerities there. Swamiji lived alone in a garden-house and we stayed in other places. We would gather together occasionally. During this time Swamiji visited Ghazipur to meet Pavhari Baba and spent some days at his cottage.

The first attempt to practise tapasya in the Himalayas was not very successful. A disciple who had set out with him [from Hathras] fell seriously ill at Rishikesh, and Swamiji had to return with him to Hathras. While staying there with his disciple, Swamiji also fell ill.

Following Swamiji I too had set out for the Himalayas. On the way I decided to visit Vrindaban and got down at Hathras. Just when I was ready to board the train for Vrindaban I happened to hear that Swamiji was also there and that he was not well. I cancelled my Vrindaban trip and found Swamiji after a little search. Seeing me he said: 'Brother Tarak, you have come! I had thought that you would come only after I went to Haridwar, set up a hut, and then wrote to you. Anyway, please come back here after visiting Vrindaban so that we can go together to Rishikesh for tapasya.'

But when I got back to Hathras after visiting Vrindaban I could see that Swamiji was very ill. I told him: 'You need not go to the Himalayas for tapasya now; your health is very bad. I won't go either, I'll take you along to the monastery.' Swamiji replied: 'No, since you have set out with a noble resolve, you should go to Haridwar, and I'll proceed towards Haridwar after I recover.' 'This can never be,' I said. 'There's no way I can leave you in this condition and go away. I'll take you to the monastery, for sure. You're lying ill in a remote place like this, and I go away to practise austerities! Never!' Swamiji agreed to my plan and we left for Calcutta the same day.

After spending some days in the monastery Swamiji again felt a great urge to go to the

Himalayas to practise austerities. He visited various places in the Himalayas together with three or four brother disciples and finally went to Rishikesh where he started tapasya. After spending some days joyfully in spiritual practices, along with his brother disciples, he fell seriously ill. Later, the group descended to the plains. Swamiji then spent some time in a quiet garden-house in Meerut town, and having fully recovered his health set out alone as an itinerant in the direction of Rajputana. Before leaving he said to his brother disciples: 'You carry on with your spiritual disciplines as you wish; I shall travel alone now. None of you will hear of me for some time.'

And in fact we received very little news about Swamiji for the next three years. When we were at the Alambazar monastery we occasionally received news of Swamiji being somewhere in the Kathiawar district. One day we suddenly received a long letter from him, about ten to twelve pages, written in French; from this we gathered that he was learning French. After this we received no more news.

All these events occurred between 1889 and 1893. At the end of April [*sic*] 1893 he left for America to speak on the Hindu religion at the parliament of religions in Chicago. In 1897, while on his way to India, Swamiji first disembarked from his ship in Sri Lanka. From there he was invited to Madras. I, along with a few monks of our monastery, went to receive him at Madura (the S I Railway terminated at Madura). After alighting from the stagecoach of the raja of Ramnad at Madura, he embraced us with great joy. He was accompanied by his disciples, Captain and Mrs Sevier and Mr Goodwin. All of us rested at the palace of the raja of Ramnad. In the evening the educated community of Madura presented Swamiji with an address of welcome at Madura College. Here I experienced, for the first time, the force of Swamiji's lectures.

Never before had I seen such vigorous manifestation of power in his speech, though I had lived and travelled with him. He had acquired such command of a foreign (English) language that it now seemed to be his mother tongue. The college build-

ing was filled to overflowing, and people were even standing outside—the audience remained transfixed, listening to his lecture in mute wonder. That evening we left for Madras aboard the mail train. On the way, Professor Rangachari, MD, Swamiji's old friend, requested him to stay for a day in Kumbakonam, the southern Kashi (here the Sanskrit language is very popular, as in Kashi; there is also a first-class college here). Swamiji could not ignore his request, and got down at Kumbakonam. In the evening, at the professor's request, he gave a long lecture at the college lasting two hours. The teachers and students as well as the scholars present were charmed by the powerful lecture. Next morning we left for Madras. On getting down at the [Madras] station we found the platform overflowing with people; we could not find a way out of the station. The police commissioner came to Swamiji's compartment with a few sergeants and, leading him by the hand, took him out of the crowd to a chariot kept for him. We too accompanied him.

Outside the station we found the roads, balconies, rooftops, and even the nearby trees full of people with their eyes on Swamiji's chariot—as though eagerly waiting to see a god. It took us about two hours to reach our destination [Castle Kernan]. We stayed in Madras for five or six days, and Swamiji delivered nearly as many lectures during this period. Then, along with a few of his educated Madras disciples, he travelled by steamer to Calcutta. We accompanied him, as did his foreign disciples. Even during the several days on the steamer Swamiji held plenty of discussion on religious topics with English clergymen who were co-passengers. The clergymen learned many things from Swamiji. The steamer deck became a veritable lecture hall. When Swamiji held conversations, all passengers would assemble on the deck to hear them.

Swamiji reached Calcutta and was welcomed with great éclat. Here too he delivered two or three lectures. We spent a few days with him in the monastery in great joy. The bliss of those days cannot be described in words.

Swamiji's health had broken down due to exces-



sive work in Europe and America; so he decided to rest for some time in the Himalayas and left for the Almora hills, which he was familiar with, to rest with a few disciples. At that time I happened to be in Almora, and thus got the opportunity to be with him again for a few days. We had many instructive discussions. Gradually Swamiji started feeling better. A few days before Swamiji arrived at Almora, the monastery was transferred from Alambazar to a rented house near the present Belur Math on the western bank of the Ganga.

From Almora Swamiji asked me to go to Ceylon [now Sri Lanka] and establish a Vedanta Society there. I stayed there for about eight months and established an association called the Colombo Vedanta Society. While in Colombo I would receive regular news about Swamiji staying in Belur and spending his time joyously with his brother disciples and his own disciples. My desire to be in his holy company again grew so strong that I soon returned to Calcutta and started staying at Belur.

Towards the end of 1901 or the beginning of 1902 I was staying at Kankhal Sevashrama on account of some work. I heard that Swamiji's health was very bad; he was coming to Kashi for rest and would stay there in the garden-house of Babu Kalikrishna Thakur. On getting this news I went to Kashi, but on reaching there found that Swamiji was yet to arrive. Kalikrishna-babu was himself getting the house cleaned. After that was done he said to the workers: 'Swamiji will use all the rooms that I use, and as long as Swamiji stays in the garden-house all of you shall be at his service.' Having made this arrangement he left for Calcutta. On his arrival I found Swamiji very thin, but the effect of change of climate was apparent within a few days and he started feeling a little better. While Swamiji was staying at the garden-house, the abbot of Kedarnath invited Swamiji to the temple with all honour; we also accompanied Swamiji. After the darshan of Kedarnath the venerable abbot took Swamiji to his own quarters. He fed us sumptuously—and with great love—with the choicest prasada of Kedarnath. He also worshipped Swamiji as he would worship

Lord Shiva and presented him with ochre robes and *kaupina*. We returned to the garden-house in the evening.

The raja of Bhinga, Ayodhya, was living in retirement near the Durga temple in Kashi. A graduate of Calcutta University and a renowned politician, he was also a former member of the U P Council and the Imperial Council. When he learned of Swamiji's arrival in Varanasi, he sent him presents of fruits, flowers, and sweets. He also made the following request: 'Following the rules of Vanaprastha, I do not go out of my house. I shall feel gratified if you kindly come and grant darshan to this servant of yours. Please forgive my insolence.' In reply, Swamiji said to the raja's representative, 'Though I am not keeping good health, I shall certainly go to meet the raja. I am a sannyasin and have no prestige at stake.' The next day the raja sent a vehicle and Swamiji went to meet him, taking us along. In the course of a long conversation the raja said to Swamiji: 'I have been following your work since you left for America. It is my belief that you are one of the religious teachers of this age, just as Buddha and Shankaracharya were in the past. For long I have cherished a desire to have your darshan; today I am fortunate to have this wish fulfilled. I have been staying in Kashi for a long time and have been spending time with many savants, scholars, and monks, but have not seen the spirit of true religion in anyone. It is my ardent request that you start a centre here for the propagation of the liberal principles of Vedanta that you have been preaching. I shall donate a small amount for this purpose.' Saying this, the raja handed over some money to Swamiji. Swamiji said, 'I myself am not in good health right now, but I will engage one of my brother disciples in this work. Yours is indeed a noble resolve.'

While Swamiji was at Kashi, a high official of the arts department of the Japanese government (who had come to take Swamiji to Japan to preach Vedanta) stayed with him for a few days. Of course, Swamiji's poor health prevented him from visiting Japan.

(Continued on page 398)

# Sister Nivedita: Art for National Awakening

Dr Anil Baran Ray

(Continued from the previous issue)

THE new art movement had got an encouraging start; but the tempo was to be sustained. The new trends and art patterns created by Abanindranath needed to be followed up and developed. Fortunately, Abanindranath's disciples, such as Nandalal Basu, followed in his footsteps—taking up Indian subjects and Indian painting style.

## Nandalal Basu's Works

Nivedita's appreciative comments on some of Nandalal's works are worth recalling. Elated at seeing *The Death-Bed of Dasharatha* by young Nandalal, still a student at the Government School of Art, Calcutta, Nivedita wrote an appreciative note in the *Modern Review* of October 1907.<sup>32</sup> This painting portrayed Queen Kaushalya's pain at the imminent passing of her husband, King Dasharatha of Ayodhya. The dignity, refinement, self-restraint, and simple pathos that the young artist brought to bear upon the scene deeply moved Nivedita: 'Mr. Abanindranath Tagore can no longer be said to represent his own school of painting by himself. He has succeeded in creating a following. The pupils of the Art School have begun to produce original work of true value. It may be said that Modern Indian Art at once genuinely Indian and genuinely Modern—is born at last' (70).

Having given Abanindranath the credit for leading the new art movement of India, Nivedita, of course, did not forget to mention the debt that the movement owed to Havell:

Those who care for the birth of a great new art of India, worthy of her past, and fit to become one of the springs of her future, may pray, with trem-

Ahalya,  
Nandalal Basu



bling joy, for the work now being done, and the beginnings now being shown, in the Calcutta Art School, under Mr. A. N. Tagore. Nor must we forget that to Mr. E. B. Havell is due the credit of having foreseen these possibilities, and having laboured to make the appointments that have proved so fruitful (71).

Nivedita drew a comparison between Abanindranath and Nandalal in terms of their approaches to the paintings *Sita* and *Sati*. If Abanindranath's *Sita* represented the idea that strength of character constituted the noblest element of Indian womanhood, Nandalal's *Sati* carried forward his guru's idea and made the point tellingly that perfect fearlessness in the sacrifice of self was the supreme manifestation of strength. The message implicit in these paintings was that the more the Indian women manifested strength and fearlessness, the more the nation was likely to make its mark and move forward globally.

The theme of strength figures in another of Nandalal's paintings: *Ahalya*. Nivedita rates *Ahalya* as 'a great triumph for any artist of any age and experience' for its great portrayal of strength in the long-petrified Ahalya coming back to life and freedom. The one flaw in this otherwise great picture, observes Nivedita, lies in Rama, Lakshmana, and

even Vasishtha not looking manly enough. One can almost hear the echo of Swami Vivekananda in Nivedita's observation: 'We want the man who is a man, and could never, in his untamed and irrepressible strength, be anything else' (ibid). With manhood being truly manly and womanhood being equally strong and free in rising from the stupor of centuries, India, as Nivedita—and certainly her master, Swami Vivekananda—conceived it, was sure to rise again, shining in all spheres of life, including art.

Strength is the theme of yet another Ramayana-based painting by Nandalal: *Kaikeyi*. Nivedita suggests that Nandalal's *Kaikeyi* represents the idea that strength coexists with the nobility of the higher self, not with the ambition of the lower self. The picture depicts the struggle between nobility and ambition in Kaikeyi's mind. Ambition is about to prevail over nobility, but Kaikeyi seems to be sorry all the same for allowing her lower self to prevail over her true and higher self.

The picture inspired Nivedita to draw a comparison between Kaikeyi and Lady Macbeth and led her to the conclusion that 'there is a refinement and sensitiveness in the Indian character, which is not shown to us in the grim Scots wife' (68–9). Through such comparisons Nivedita reminded Indians that they had every reason to be proud of their great heritage in art, literature, and culture.



Kaikeyi,  
Nandalal Basu



Damayanti's Swayamvara, Nandalal Basu

The theme of *Damayanti's Swayamvara*, another of Nandalal's creations, also appealed to Nivedita. She appreciates Damayanti's courage and resourcefulness as well as her tenderness towards her stricken husband, Nala. Of all the heroines of the Mahabharata, observes Nivedita, there is none like Damayanti, 'except perhaps Gandhari—so strong and living and rounded out, with the vigour and complexity of early Aryan womanhood' (72). Referring to the story of Nala and Damayanti, Nivedita observes that the story 'is one of the fairest flowers of the Indian Heroic Age', that it is without peer in Indo-European literature.

The strength manifest in the dynamic destruction of things fleeting and ephemeral, in the dispersal of all illusion, is an idea that Nivedita finds beautifully depicted in Nandalal's *Dance of Shiva*. "The Dance of Shiva," she says, 'is Samadhi becoming dynamic. It is Samadhi represented as physical activity.' It is in this sense that Shiva is Nataraja, the 'dancing king'. Nivedita claims that it is only Indians, 'the sons of our Motherland'—and Nivedita



The Dance of Shiva, Nandalal Basu

counted herself an Indian ever since she accepted Swami Vivekananda's discipleship—who can love and worship a God who is a destroyer, a Rudra: 'In the world, there is but one India, and even in India, only one Shiva! ... the conception of Mahadeva represents as extraordinary an achievement of the human mind, in one line, as Newton's *Principia* in another. For sheer emotional profundity, for philosophical daring and for the directness of its approach to the Infinite, the whole world's poetry can offer nothing like this piece of Hindu mythology' (67).

Fearlessness, strength, and power could also be expressed through the grotesque in art, as was done in Nandalal's *Vikramaditya and the Vetal*: 'It [*Vikramaditya and the Vetal*] belongs of course to the grotesque side of art, and while we love not the grotesque, in and for itself, there can be no doubt that the Indian fearlessness in dealing with it, is one of its greatest signs of strength and power' (75). As one who does not prize the grotesque in art, in and for itself, Nivedita has these words of caution for

budding artists: 'We would remind all students of art that their true function is the revelation of the beautiful, the true, and the good. It is not the fugitive moments of personal experience, but the eternal and the universal, that come best to the world through them' (ibid.).

One may not agree with the above assertion. One may value art for itself; believe that art should express the private and the personal as much as the social, the national, or the universal; and maintain that art could be used to capture the fleeting as much as the lasting. But, then, one has to keep in mind that Nivedita was writing to serve the needs of a particular time in India's history, and in that context there was an overwhelming need to highlight the portrayal of strength, fearlessness, and power.

Nivedita's eye for the ideal is also apparent in her review of Nandalal's *Jagai and Madhai*. She saw in this painting not two roughs given to potations of delight but two souls in search of an ideal. An undercurrent of this quest had always been there with Jagai and Madhai and their roughness was actually derived from this fearless search. The moment they found the source of highest ecstasy, they bade goodbye to all 'counterfeit intoxication' and became truly free: 'Avaunt, all counterfeit intoxications! *Nothing lower than the first step towards the best shall content us henceforth*' (75; emphasis added). This was also Nivedita's message to young Indians.


### Tapaswini Uma

In sum, Nivedita inspired young Indian artists, encouraged the publication of their paintings in such magazines as the *Prabasi* and the *Modern Review*, wrote constructive reviews on these publications, and also penned reflective essays helping the artists with positive inspiring ideas furthering their work along nationalist lines.<sup>33</sup> She wanted to give young artists exposure to classical Indian art. She had artists such as Nandalal and Asit Haldar drafted into Lady Herringham's team of British artists who had come from England to make copies of the classic Ajanta paintings, and bore all the expenses of their tour.<sup>34</sup>

Nandalal, Nivedita's trusted lieutenant in the

new art movement, said of her: 'The artists always dwelt in her mind. I can never say enough about the encouragement I received from her.'<sup>35</sup> If Nandalal was wholehearted in his praise of Nivedita as 'a guiding angel' of the artists working for the new art movement, Asit Haldar was equally candid in his acknowledgement of Nivedita's encouragement: 'That was the period of the renaissance of ancient Indian art. Nivedita was happy at this national awakening. Nandalal and myself often went to meet her at Baghbazar. ... Nivedita told us that on us depended the revival of Indian art which was rapidly approaching extinction and that the revival of national art would be our great contribution in the movement of national awakening and freedom.'<sup>36</sup>

Abanindranath likened Nivedita to 'Tapaswini Uma'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Nandalal had painted a picture with the same title. Much like Uma's sacrifice, Nivedita's love for India—apparent in her desire to see India rise as a nation in her own right, taking great strides in education, religion, politics, and art—was total and unconditional. In Abanindranath's

estimation Nivedita stood the tallest among the foreigners who loved India selflessly.<sup>38</sup> Her lasting contribution to India lay in opening the eyes of Indians to the beautiful in their country and its art and institutions. Abanindranath could not have been more forthright in his acknowledgement of Nivedita's contribution to the development of Indian art when he wrote on Nivedita's death that 'it will be hard to find another like her again'.<sup>39</sup> 

### Notes and References

32. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 3.69–71.
33. Apart from Nandalal, Suren Ganguly and Asit Haldar were among those who benefited from Nivedita's inspiration and patronage.
34. Nivedita's letters written between 14 December 1909 and 31 March 1910 contain numerous references to the Bengali artists' visit to Ajanta as members of Mrs Herringham's team; see *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, vol 2. Nivedita put in considerable effort to persuade Mrs Herringham to accept the Bengali artists in her team, despite her submission that she already had the members of her team fixed. She visited Ajanta personally to look after them and when, on their journey back to Bengal they were harassed by the police, she took up the matter with Mrs Herringham and other Britishers who were sympathetic with India and her people.
- Lady Minto, wife of the British governor general, was a friend and admirer of Nivedita. In her letter of 17 March 1910 to Miss Josephine MacLeod, Nivedita wrote of her plan to present an Ajanta sketch by a Bengali artist to Lady Minto; see *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2.1080; also Barendranath Niyogi, *Shilpa-jijnasay Shilpi Dipankar Nandalal* (Kolkata: Bharatbani Prakashani), 24. Nivedita was so keenly interested in Ajanta that she offered to write the historical part of an illustrated book on Ajanta that she heard Mrs Herringham had planned to author. See *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2.1082.
35. *An Album of Nandalal Bose* (Calcutta: Shantiniketan Ashramik Sangha, 1956), 10.
36. *The Modern Review* (April 1910), 411.
37. *Shilpa-jijnasay Shilpi Dipankar Nandalal*, 27.
38. Abanindranath Tagore, *Jorasankor Dhare* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1351 BE), 111.
39. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2.1287. This letter to E B Havell, bearing Abanindranath's assessment of those who made the Indians 'feel the magnitude and grandeur of their art heritage', is an invaluable document.



Tapaswini Uma,  
Nandalal Basu

# Narada Bhakti Sutra

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

## 53. Prakāśate kvāpi pātre.

*Such a manifestation [of bhakti] takes place in a rare one.*

SUCH a receptacle, *adhikārin*, capable of transcendental bhakti, is rare. This is not said to dishearten the sadhaka, but to emphasize the transcendental nature of that state. The sadhaka must be very careful about ‘I and mine’, even after achieving oneness with Bhagavan. You must take utmost care against the reappearance of ‘I and mine’ in any form. For this reason Narada says it is very rare. If that is the case, what then is the result?

## 54. Guṇa-rahitaṁ kāmanā-rahitaṁ pratikṣaṇa-vardhamānaṁ avicchinnam sūkṣmataraṁ anubhava-rūpam.

*It is beyond the guṇas, untouched by desire, increasing every moment, unbroken, extremely subtle, a matter of personal experience.*

*Guṇarahitam*: In the *bhakti-niṣṭha* consciousness that feels ‘I am one with Bhagavan’ there is no sense of the subject-object duality of different categories—tamasic, rajasic, or sattvic. There is no subject-object dichotomy with regard to gross enjoyment, no rajasic subject-object dichotomy of activity; no ego-sense of noble actions due to the sattvic subject-object realism.

*Kāmanā-rahitam*: Why has this been said, when absence of the subject-object duality presupposes absence of desire? On awaking from sleep,

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The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda’s classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur. The classes were conducted between 17 December 1965 and 24 January 1966.

although we know that the dream is unreal, its feeling and remembrance linger on and only go away slowly and of their own accord. Similarly, you know that the world is unreal and is gradually disappearing from your consciousness; yet a semblance of reality remains. When the sadhaka proceeds towards absolute realization, earlier mental urges keep appearing, though infrequently, till they finally disappear. Then the sadhaka becomes *kāmanā-rahita*, says Narada.

Along with this there is increasing direct experience, *anubhava*, of Bhagavan. There is an ever-increasing incomparable dynamism. Hence *pratikṣaṇa-vardhamānaṁ avicchinnam*, continuous non-stop increase in the degree of spiritual experience.

*Sūkṣmataram*: The experience goes deeper and deeper, with ever increasing experience, till the sadhaka reaches the final absolute realization. If you sincerely and truly cultivate genuine transcendental spiritual consciousness, the subject-object world and the urge to go towards that world will disappear from you more and more; the mind will automatically become more and more indrawn, and greater and greater identification with Brahman will take place.

## 55. Tat prāpya tadevāvalokayati tadeva śṇoti tadeva bhāṣayati tadeva cintayati.

*Obtaining that the bhakta sees It alone, hears of It alone, speaks of It alone, thinks of It alone.*

After reaching *nirvikalpa samadhi*, if a person happens to come down to the relative level, he finds the world thoroughly changed. His personality, along

with his consciousness, is completely changed. He sees only Bhagavan, *tadeva avalokayati*—that very Reality that he realized in samadhi—in all forms, in all men and women. When a cat entered Mahapurush Maharaj's [Swami Shivananda's] room, his behaviour showed that he perceived not the cat but the absolute Reality. 'The seer is He, the seen is He; the hearer is He, the hearing is He; the talker is He, the talked about is He; the thinker, thought, and thinking is He.' This is the zenith of realization as described by Narada. Sri Ramakrishna told Swamiji that the highest and fullest realization is: 'What is within is also without. All is God.' He also said: '*Kaliyuge naradiya bhakti*; in the Kaliyuga the path of bhakti as described by Narada is the way.' Why? Because it teaches this absolute transcendental bhakti culminating in realization of the immanent.

#### 56. *Gauṇī tridhā, guṇabhedād ārtādi-bhedād vā.*

*Preparatory bhakti is of three types, according to the guṇas, or according to the type of aspirant—one in distress, etc.*

*Parā-bhakti*, the ideal bhakti, has been described. Now *gauṇī-bhakti*, preparatory or secondary bhakti, which is necessary for gradual evolution, is being described. We need not feel depressed if we don't have *parā-bhakti*. Narada considers our situation and says that there is another type of bhakti which you may have according to your psychological constitution. One need not feel hurt or depressed if one is not being advised to practise *parā-bhakti*. If one attempts to practise *parā-bhakti*, there might be unhealthy reactions. An average person may by nature be sattvic, rajasic, or tamasic. So, one may naturally have sattvic bhakti, rajasic bhakti, or tamasic bhakti. One may have simple sattvic bhakti with unselfishness, but not transcendental bhakti. Another person may have pompous bhakti with a lot of glamour and show. Similarly, a person who is tamasic by nature will have tamasic bhakti. *Tamas* clouds the understanding; for this reason such devotees become fanatics. Although they are all

bhaktas, they worship and perform sadhana with different attitudes.

The sattvic bhakta is the best of the three; because of his calm nature he gets greater absorption in God and this leads him gradually to *parā-bhakti*. If a rajasic bhakta continues sincerely with his devotion, his love will make him overcome his attraction for external grandeur and slowly he will become a sattvic bhakta. Thereafter he will gain *parā-bhakti*. Likewise, a tamasic bhakta may initially avoid the labour of collecting flowers, for instance, but if he persists, love will make him dynamic; he may reach *parā-bhakti* through *rajas* and *sattva*. So whatever might be the *guṇa*, if the bhakta is sincere, he will evolve to *parā-bhakti*. This is the power of love.

Now Narada takes up various types of reactions as mentioned in the Gita. There may not be any bhakti in a person, but as a reaction or response to some difficulties, like a fatal disease, he may develop a sort of love for God. These may be mere reactions to certain situations, but gradually they may develop into bhakti.

*Jijñāsu* is another category: persons who don't have real aspiration, but seek information about God. Some day or other devotion will grow in them imperceptibly, and their curiosity will grow into devotional curiosity. Anything directed towards God will gradually lead to a higher evolution. Even if it is not in your nature today, gradually, it will become natural bhakti. If this curiosity is misdirected it might lead one lower and lower.

Still another category is the *arthārthin*: one who worships for the sake of money or for some other secular reason like name, fame, power, and position. Tarasundari prayed to Swami Brahmananda to bless her for success in enacting the part of Ramanuja in a drama. And see the result in her life! Let them have love for God for whatever reason, says Narada. Gradually they will come to have real bhakti.

Narada, the great practical psychologist, shows the positive side, shows how a person may have practically no bhakti to begin with, and yet, due to reactions to situations, may proceed towards God.

(To be continued)

# Girish and Sri Sarada Devi

Swami Chetanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

HOLY MOTHER went to the Minerva Theatre again on 1 March 1905 to see *Jana* performed. Girish based this play on the Mahabharata; it was first staged on 23 December 1893. Jana, a highly powerful and spiritual soul, was the wife of Niladhvaja, the virtuous king of Mahishmati. This royal couple had a son named Prabir. Prince Prabir was a great hero and had been made invincible by the grace of Shiva. In the play King Yudhishtira performs the horse sacrifice, in which his horse roams through all of the kingdoms and their rulers pay their allegiance to him. Arjuna was protecting the horse. Instead of paying obeisance to Yudhishtira, the heroic prince Prabir captured the horse and kept it for himself. War between Arjuna and Prabir was inevitable. Prabir won the first battle. To protect Arjuna, Krishna schemed to tempt Prabir with Rati, the goddess of lust. She took away Prabir's power, and the next day he was killed. Krishna later blessed Niladhvaja and Jana.

In this play Girish introduced the role of a jester, whose part he took himself. He portrayed his own character in that role, criticizing and using abusive words against Krishna—but at the same time showing deep devotion to him. He had once treated his guru, Ramakrishna, the same way. As Holy Mother watched Girish's performance, she laughed. Swami Saradananda asked, 'Mother, why are you laughing?' Mother replied: 'I see Girish's own character reflected in that role. I know he is endowed with deep faith and he believes that one can have liberation by calling on God—and again he abuses God.'<sup>10</sup>

Holy Mother's next visit to the Minerva Theatre was on 22 April 1906. She saw the play *Chaitanya*

*Lila*, which the Master had seen on 21 September 1884. Ashutosh Mitra wrote:

Last night Holy Mother went to see *Chaitanya Lila*. Girish arranged for this play to be performed for one night after a long time and offered a royal box seat to the Mother. The roles of two villains—Jagai and Madhai—were enacted by Ardhendu Shekhar and Girish. Bhushan Kumari, a famous actress, had retired from the stage, but she acted in the role of Chaitanya without any remuneration because of Holy Mother. Sushilabala acted in the role of Nitai, a disciple of Chaitanya. Both actresses came and bowed down to the Mother before the play started. Holy Mother later commented: 'That girl [Bhushan] was full of devotion; otherwise one cannot act in that role. She looked and dressed like the real Chaitanya. Who could tell that she was a woman?' About Jagai and Madhai, the Mother remarked: 'Where will you find devotees like them? Likewise, where can one find devotees like Ravana and Hiranyakashipu? Girish used to scold the Master, and at the same time he had so much devotion for him. They came to this world like that. Is it easy to become a devotee? Does devotion come automatically?'<sup>11</sup>

On Sunday, 12 September 1909, Holy Mother went to the Minerva Theatre to see *Pandav Gaurav*, 'The Glory of the Pandavas'. Girish based this drama on the story of Dandi, the king of Avanti, and Urvashi, a celestial nymph. Urvashi was disrespectful to the sage Durvasa, so he cursed her saying that she would be a beautiful woman at night and a mare during the day. She would be released from the curse when the eight divine powers came together. One night Dandi went out to hunt and met Urvashi. He fell in love with her, although she told him her whole story.



Girish connected this legend with Krishna and other characters of the Mahabharata. Just before the war described in the Mahabharata, Krishna wants Dandi to give him the mare, who is really Urvashi. Dandi leaves his kingdom and runs away with the horse. At last he takes refuge with the Pandavas, who are devoted to Krishna. Bhishma says: 'The pole star of this world of maya is dharma, and the essence of dharma is to protect a person who has sought refuge.' A conflict arises between the Pandavas and Krishna that is averted only when the gods and the Divine Mother appear, manifesting all of the eight divine powers. Urvashi is thus freed from the curse and returns to heaven. In this drama Girish performed the role of Kanchuki, an old brahmana minister in Dandi's court.

Swami Shantananda recorded in his reminiscences:

I was then serving Holy Mother at Udbodhan house in Calcutta. One day Girish came to see her and invited her to see him act. Holy Mother agreed. She, Radhu, Maku, and other women devotees went in one carriage; Lalit Chattopadhyay, Dr Kanjilal, and I went in another carriage. Girish was extremely happy that the Mother had come to see his performance, and was busy trying to make the play perfect. He arranged a special box seat for the Mother and we sat next to her. The Mother silently watched the play. When Kanchuki appeared on the stage, the Mother commented: 'Oh that is Girish. He has dressed very well with wonderful make-up. It is hard to recognize him.'

The companions of the goddess sang this closing song:

Look, look, at the charming Divine Mother;  
Who says that She is a black woman?  
Open your eyes and see how Her beauty  
makes the world luminous.

The Mother calmly watched the play. I observed that when the song was sung she became absorbed in deep meditation, and she remained in that ecstatic state for some time. The Mother saw the entire play, and when we returned to Udbodhan it was 1.30 a.m.<sup>12</sup>

There was a benefit performance for the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service in Varanasi at the Minerva Theatre on 12 July 1910. On that occasion Holy Mother saw two of Girish's plays: *Vilwamangal Thakur* and *Jana*.

According to Akshayachaitanya, the Holy Mother went to see *Kalapahar*, another play by Girish, at the Manomohan Theatre at 68 Beadon Street on 1 September 1915, a few years after Girish passed away—on 8 February 1912. Girish had based *Kalapahar* on a historical incident, but added devotional elements and Ramakrishna's teachings into it.

In September 1918 Holy Mother went to see *Ramanuj* performed at the Minerva Theatre. This play, about a saint and philosopher of the eleventh century, was written by Apareschandra Mukhopadhyay, an actor, playwright, and a close associate of Girish. Pravrajika Bharatiprana, an attendant and disciple of the Holy Mother, wrote:

Holy Mother, Golap-ma, Yogin-ma, I, and many others went to see the play *Ramanuj* at the Minerva Theatre. Aparesch arranged special seats for us. The Mother was happy to see the play. There was a scene in which the guru tells Ramanuj during initiation: 'Never tell this mantra to others. He who hears this mantra will be liberated. If you share this mantra with others, you will go to hell.' For the benefit of humanity, the great soul Ramanuj disobeys his guru and loudly utters that mantra to others. Seeing that scene, the Mother went into samadhi. The famous actress Tarasundari acted in the role of Ramanuj. After that scene she came to bow down to the Mother, but found that she had no outer consciousness. After Golap-ma's repeated calls, the Mother regained partial consciousness. Then Tara bowed down to her. The Mother hugged Tara, considering her to be Ramanuj. When the play was over, all of the actresses came and bowed down to Mother. Later they came to Udbodhan to pay their respects to her (74-5).

Kshirodprasad Vidyavinod, a famous playwright and a devotee of Mother, wanted her to see *Kinnari*, a musical play. On Sunday, 8 September 1918, Mother went to see it with Swami Saradananda.<sup>13</sup>


As a mother's heart never discriminates between her good and bad children, so Holy Mother loved the stage actresses although they came from questionable backgrounds. Holy Mother appreciated their talents in acting and music, as well as their sincere devotion to her. She had been born and brought up in a conservative and orthodox brahmana family, but she understood the importance of the theatre: it carries art and culture, religion and philosophy, history and tradition to the masses. The puritans of society gradually became silent when Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda each visited theatres and gave recognition to the actors and actresses, who were then being treated like outcasts by society.



Girish's talent and magnetic personality attracted many people, whom he brought to the Master and Holy Mother. He was extremely generous with his support of the Master, Mother, and the disciples of Ramakrishna. Later, Holy Mother recalled some incidents regarding Girish: 'It was Suresh [Surendra Nath] Mitra who gave money regularly to support the monastery. Girish also gave something. He bore all my expenses for a year and a half, while I was at Nilambar Babu's house at Belur. ... Earlier he was a wretch and used to move in bad company, running a theatre. But he was a man of great faith, so he received the Master's unbounded grace. The Master gave him liberation. ... Once the Master said: "Girish was born as a part of Shiva."<sup>14</sup>

On another occasion the Mother said: 'The Master's disease was due to accepting the sins of others. He said, "[I have this cancer because] I took on Girish's sins. He would not be able to bear the suffering of his sinful actions." The Master had the power to die at will. He could have easily given up the body in samadhi. But [he endured all that pain] saying, "Ah! If I could tie them [his young disciples] together in a unit"' (197–8).

On 11 February 1912 the Holy Mother said to a devotee: 'Alas, Girish is dead. Today is the fourth day. His relatives came here to invite me to their house

to attend the ritual. He is no more; so I did not feel the need to go there. Ah! A veritable Indra [king of the gods] has fallen! Oh, what tremendous faith and devotion he had for the Master!' (9). 

## References


10. Sri Sri Ramakrishnadev O Bhakta-Bhairav Girishchandra, 77–8.
11. Ashutosh Mitra, *Sri Ma* (Kolkata: Ananda, 2008), 127.
12. *Matridarshan*, 30–2.
13. 'Minerva Theatre', *Udbodhan*, 330.
14. *Mayer Katha* (Kolkata, Udbodhan, 2004), 39.

(Continued from page 389)

In the middle of 1899 Swamiji went to America again, via England. After preaching for about a year and a half, establishing a couple of Vedanta centres, and putting Swamis Abhedananda and Turiyananda in charge of these centres, he returned to India in December 1900 in poor health. He suffered much from diabetes for about two or three years.

In June 1902 Swamiji sent me to Varanasi to establish an 'Advaita Ashrama' there. This was his last work for the propagation of Vedanta. I stayed in Varanasi for five years in obedience to his command. Swamiji attained mahasamadhi on 4 July 1902, soon after the ashrama had taken a permanent shape.

While staying with Swamiji at Belur, I found many fresh college students coming to him to learn about spirituality and lead pure lives. Gradually his fame started resounding vigorously across India, and religious and service centres were established in many parts of India.

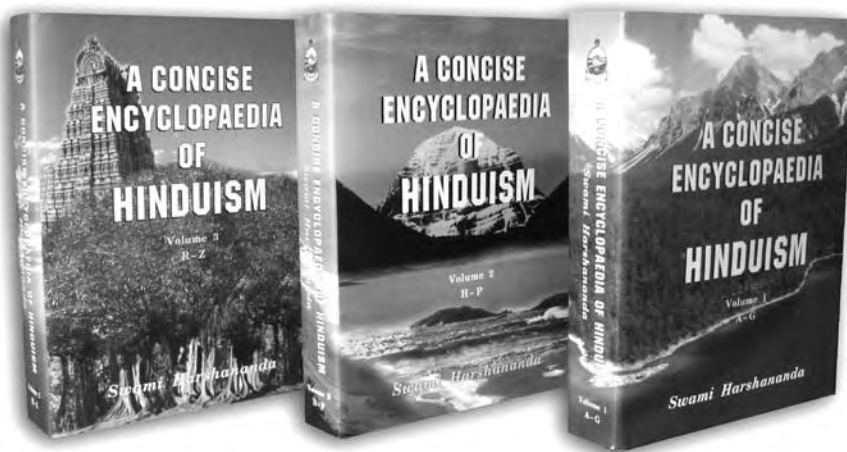
There is no doubt that even a little study of this great soul's life will release us from 'great fear'. 

[Several facts mentioned in this article are at variance with information available in other sources. These have been left unaltered in view of the historicity of this document. —Editor]

# REVIEW ARTICLE

## *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*

Swami Harshananda



**Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019. E-mail: rkmbblr@dataone.in.  
2008. vol 1: xxx + 674 pp; vol 2: xxxii + 608 pp; vol 3: xxxii + 704 pp. Rs 1,500.**

ONE of the most remarkable consequences of the advent of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta movement is the contemporizing of core spiritual and cultural Hindu texts, especially in English. Swami Vivekananda bore holes through the hard granite of traditional texts and forged an extraordinarily supple and flexible idiom in English for those texts—an idiom which to this day remains exquisitely original, both in its terminology and thematic range and in its linguistic nuances. Chakravarti Rajagopalachari is said to have described English as the greatest gift of Goddess Saraswati to India, and to this gift was added Swamiji's compelling command over communication skills.

This led to a renaissance of classical Hindu texts and a tremendous increase in their accessibility in flawless English translations, thanks to the efforts

of the Ramakrishna Order. Besides the major Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, and the *Brahma Sutra*, we also have their corresponding commentaries, especially those of Shankara and Ramanuja, available in English. And not one translation but quite a few. We also have translations of independent treatises such as *Vivekachudamani* and the perennially popular *Narada Bhakti Sutra*. The translations of *Yatindra-mata-dipika*, *Vedanta Paribhasha*, *Sankhya Karika*, *Mimamsa Paribhasha*, *Tarka Sangraha*, *Atmabodha*, and other such texts remain authentic references to this day. Among epics, Swami Tapasyananda's translation of the Bhagavata and the *Adhyatma Ramayana* are classics. It is also remarkable that many of these texts have been made available in Indian vernacular languages by various Ramakrishna centres.

The monumental volumes of the *Cultural*

*Heritage of India* are another classic contribution of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta movement. These are, in themselves, symbols of the vitality and resilience of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta tradition in contemporizing the Shrutis—core values free from the encrustations of the Smriti elements that over the years vitiated them. It is to this remarkable genre of renascent Indian Hindu heritage, as exemplified and embodied in the Ramakrishna tradition, that Swami Harshananda's *Concise Encyclopaedia of Hinduism* belongs.

### **Tradition Balanced with Contemporaneity**

This remarkable set of volumes is distinctive in many ways. It is a single-handed work of painstaking research by one who is at home with both English and Sanskrit. Moreover, Swami Harshananda is rooted in a tradition-modernity equilibrium which gives to every entry authenticity as well as a contemporary ambience, something rare in such encyclopaedias. Clarity and brevity combine with a quality of comprehensiveness, providing every entry the space and coverage it demands.

The author has numerous publications which are popular with readers—his *Shandilya Bhakti Sutra* is a pioneering translation of that text. But this three-volume work, which he worked at for more than three decades, is the culmination of all his preceding works. Totalling more than 2,000 pages, the volumes are embellished with carefully selected photographs as also exquisitely sketched line drawings.

Explaining the methodology of writing he adopted, the swami says that 'the entries have been arranged in the English alphabetical order', and 'since most of the subject headings are in Sanskrit standard dialectical marks ... have been adopted'. He has included valuable cross-references as well. Interestingly, there are also entries on several English terms such as 'polyandry', 'polygamy', and 'dream'. But, for me, the most revelatory aspect of this work is the provision of the root meaning of most entries. This, to say the least, gives a new turn, tone, and temper to the words. For instance, *dr̥ṣṭānta* is usually taken to mean 'example'; but

it does not simply mean an analogy, it is 'that by which the conclusion is *seen*' (emphasis added). In short, perception and insight are the corollaries of this familiar word. Another example is the meaning given for *samsāya*: 'that which sleeps [or remains in the mind]'; thus, the word goes 'beyond doubt' and suggests the dormant, natural tendency to interrogate—a tendency ingrained in the very structure of the mind. Indeed, the contents show comprehensiveness and concision.

Of course, in volumes like these there are bound to be major areas which constitute the core, the perennial topics, as also the scaffolds which support that core. But this division is only functional. As the swami puts it in his entry on Hinduism: 'Hinduism is like a centre of gravity doll which always regains its upright position however much it might be upset'; that is, it has both maladies and melodies. 'Hinduism', says the swami, 'appears to many as a jigsaw puzzle. But, if one knows where to put the pieces, not only is the puzzle easily solved, but also gives rise to a beautiful picture.' Thus Hinduism is a religion, a philosophy, a culture with an unbelievable interior resilience, working out, in Mark Tully's words, the implications of 'pluralism' which is 'acknowledging the uncertainty of certainties'. Besides those mentioned above, the encyclopaedia covers many other important subjects: mythology, rituals, pilgrim centres, epics, astrology, biographies of religious leaders, iconography, Sanskrit, temples and religious institutions, Agamas, Tantras, and the list continues. A refreshingly pluralistic perspective leads to the inclusion of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, which 'are closely allied', says the author, to Hinduism.

### **An Exploratory and Interpretive Study**

I felt that instead of reading it through—and it makes a fascinating reading—one has an alternative: to look up themes which impinge on Hindu beliefs and practices in today's context. They could be sociological like sati, caste, and dharma; philosophical like maya and karma; or psychological like dhyana and samadhi. One is surprised to note

that sati 'dates back to the earliest cultures' and 'it existed among the Kings of Ur, the ancient Chinese and some early Indo-European peoples'; and the least widely known fact is that 'with the solitary exception of the *Viṣṇudharma-sūtras*, no other work including the famous *Manusmṛiti*, has ordained it'. Interestingly, 'it is not that Raja Ramamohan Roy was the first person who fought against this abominable custom. Ancient commentators of scriptures like Medhātithi (circa 10th century) and literary geniuses like Bāṇa (7th century) have condemned the practice in no uncertain terms. All the teachers of Tantra were vehemently against it.' And what about sati in the modern context? 'If the Hindu society can vigorously propagate the idea that women can do better things in life than dying on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands, the Satī problem will die a natural death.' The swami's comments on the controversies that Western scholars raise on Ganesha are also worth noting.

This encyclopaedia is not a simple presentation of data collected over more than three decades. It is that, gloriously, but it also is an exploratory and interpretive study suggesting, where necessary, remedial measures for the decadent elements which have crept into Hinduism. And, as for interpretation, the core values of Ramakrishna-Vedanta provide the overall criteria, relevant as both specifically Hindu and generically human in their concerns.

Unravelling the implicit symbolic dimensions of even specifically Hindu myths is a good strategy. For instance, the problems of money and matrimony sway contemporary ethos. With corporate culture intruding into the academic fields, character is in crisis; the *puruṣārthas* are topsy-turvy—like 'Satyam' becoming 'Maytas'! And the entry on Puruṣa explains the word as '[one who] sleeps in the city [of nine gates, the body]', though 'in common usage, the word "puruṣa" means a man'. It further says that 'a good man should have these five qualities: giving gifts to deserving persons; appreciating the good in others; feeling happy in the company of relatives and friends; erudition in the scriptures; capacity to fight for a righteous cause', and above all he 'should

also have great self-control'. One wonders how many 'people' would qualify to be called *puruṣa*?

Another remarkable facet of this encyclopaedia is the subtle sense of humour suffusing many entries, through which symbolic meanings are linked to contemporary concerns—even when the figure is a mythic one. A telling example is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. The author says that 'in some of the sculptural depictions of Lakṣmī, the owl is shown as her carrier-vehicle'. Why an apparently ugly bird for the beautiful Lakshmi? The Sanskrit word for owl is *ulūka*, which also refers to Indra, the king of gods, 'who personifies all the wealth, power and glory that a living being can aspire for in life'. But in the absence of ethical and spiritual wealth, even the glory of wealth is 'the ugliness of an inelegant and partially blind bird.' As a counterpoint the swami adds that 'based on the beautiful description given in the *Bhagavadgītā* (2.69) we can be generous enough to compare our owl to the *shhitaprajña*, the man of steady wisdom. Then, the symbol would mean that Mother Lakṣmī is the mistress of spiritual wisdom.'

In short, this is a timely encyclopaedia, setting right, in its own remarkably balanced way, the core values of Hinduism that are quite often painted in negative terms. The spirit of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda breathes through these volumes. They can be read by anyone interested in some aspect of human life—communication, life-skills, the controlling aspirations of life, India's glorious cultural and spiritual traditions and values—or they can be enjoyed for their sheer elegance, clarity, and concision of writing. These are volumes one cannot afford to miss, and one can easily afford their modest price. Above all, for their relevance and immense readability, lucid narrative, fluent exposition, and elegant printing, these volumes are indispensable. They maintain the standards of excellence always associated with Ramakrishna Order publications and their enduring quality is evident on every page. That this is the work of a single author makes this work all the more exceptional.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

# REPORTS



New Ramakrishna temple and procession at Ichapur

## Vivekananda Award

In a function held at the **Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata**, on 18 March 2009, Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presented the Vivekananda Award, comprising one lakh rupees and a citation, to Sri Asim Chaudhuri (left)

of USA for his two books *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Findings* and *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago: New Findings*. Sri S

S Nijjar, Chief Justice, Calcutta High Court, presided over the meeting.



## News from Branch Centre

Students of the Vidyamandira at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Katihar**, enacted a drama on the Mahabharata and participated in a debate entitled 'Media is Misguiding the Common People' in the annual celebration of the Ashrama on 21 March.

## New Temple

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji consecrated the newly built Sri Ramakrishna Temple at **Ramakrishna Math, Ichapur**, on 3 April, the holy Rama Navami day. He also addressed the public meeting organized on this occasion along with Srimat

Swami Prameyanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Thousands of devotees and about 350 monastics attended the four-day programme organized from 2 to 5 April.

## Relief

**Distress Relief** · The following centres distributed various items to needy people in their respective areas: **Belgharia**: 136 saris, 397 pants, 379 shirts, 404 children's garments, 4 blankets, 120 kg milk powder, and other items; **Jalpaiguri**: 250 saris; **Kankurgachhi**: 300 saris.

**Fire Relief** · **Rajahmundry** centre distributed 140 saris, 110 lungis, 110 vests, 250 bed-sheets, 252 towels, 110 plastic mats, 106 utensil sets (each set containing 3 cooking pots, 1 water pot, 1 bucket, 2 plates, 2 glasses, and 3 ladles) to 103 families whose houses had been gutted by a ravaging fire at Rajavommangi, a tribal village in Andhra Pradesh. **Chandigarh** centre provided, under 'Build Your Own House' scheme, 73,500 bricks, 201 bags of cement, 15 trucks of sand, 210 asbestos cement sheets, 559 kg mild-steel angles, 64 pairs of door and window frames, and 168 sq ft of Kota stone slabs to 70 needy families that had been rendered homeless by a devastating fire at a slum in Chandigarh.

**Economic Rehabilitation** · Under a self-employment programme, **Antpur** centre distributed 20 van rickshaws, 10 complete weaving sets, and 146 weaving equipments, and **Saradapitha** centre distributed 4 rickshaws to the needy.



**Corrections** · April 2009, p. 291: Read 'Tani Buncho' for 'Tanu Buncho'; p. 292: read 'Shimomura Kanzan' for 'Shimomura Kazan'. May 2009, p. 308: Swami Alokanda is a member of the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi, not Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi.



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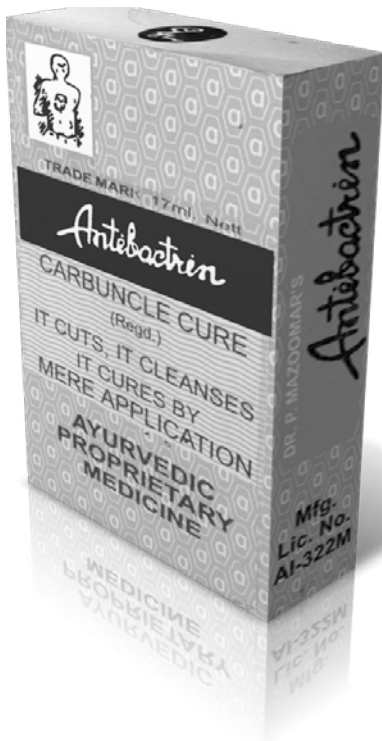
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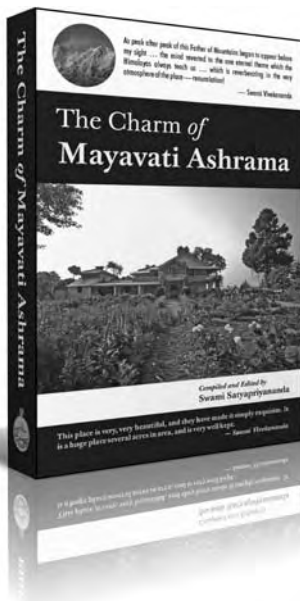
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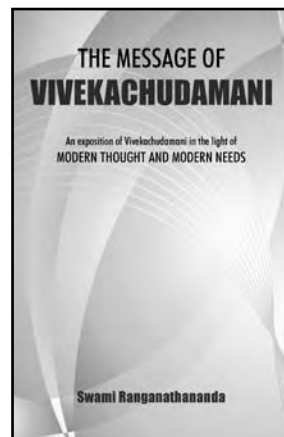
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